

Evangelization, Faith Formation, and Discipleship

Considerations for Parish Ministries and Activities

Introduction – Come Holy Spirit, Fill and Renew Us!

“Do not be afraid...” (Lk 5:10). These words of Jesus to Simon Peter are His words to us today. Their full force is undiminished. Their newness in speaking to our hearts *today* endures. “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry ‘Abba, Father!’” (Rom 8:15). By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ words have life and power now. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, transforms our hearts, casting out fear. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear...” (1 Jn 4:18).

Below are recommendations to assist pastors with their parish catechetical leaders and other ministry leaders in the Archdiocese of Atlanta when navigating and making decisions about advancing the mission of evangelization and discipleship growth in view of the global pandemic. These considerations repeat or build upon earlier guidance offered, and they benefit from the guidance developed by our Office of Catholic Schools and other dioceses as well. They will be reviewed and updated as necessary. For the latest updates from the Archdiocese concerning COVID-19, check [here](#). Come Holy Spirit, fill and renew us!

General Programming Considerations

Options for Parishes

- Unless shelter-in-place orders or other circumstances dictate otherwise, pastors may choose to offer evangelization, faith formation, and other ministry activities in the following ways:
 - (1) entirely remotely/virtually for the year or for part of the year,
 - (2) within a hybrid approach (partly remote and partly on-site), or
 - (3) within a modified in-person/on-site approach, presuming appropriate modifications to meet local and state health/safety guidelines (see below for more info).
- Catholic school and public school guidelines can be helpful and informative for a parish’s decision. Parishes are not bound to follow school decisions **unless using school facilities** and should take into account the different circumstances of faith formation and parish ministry, the capacity of the parish (staff, volunteers, facilities), and the needs and concerns of the community.

Plan for Remote/Hybrid Approaches

- To serve our need for community, in-person, social interaction is vital. The first priority for parish gatherings centers on the Mass, the availability of the sacraments, and the accessibility of the parish for prayer and for the provision of necessary pastoral care. ***Decisions about other activities should keep in mind this priority and how it might be affected by circumstances related to other in-person ministry gatherings.***
- Some parish ministries may decide to continue remotely/virtually while others shift back to on-site/in-person.
- Decisions about offering on-site gatherings in addition to liturgical/sacramental celebrations should also take into consideration local and state health/safety guidelines, the situation and concerns of leaders and volunteers, and the situation and concerns of the community/participants (see below for more info on on-site gatherings). When in doubt, consider starting remotely/virtually for a temporary or indefinite time, subject to reassessment.
- Be prepared to offer remote/virtual options at any given time, depending on circumstances and needs. Planning for a hybrid approach – a combination of virtual and modified, in-person gatherings – would allow a parish to have the flexibility it needs to adjust if in-person/on-site gatherings become more limited or not possible later in the year.
- Technology needs of homes and the parish should be assessed, which may require creative options to reach families in different ways (e.g., via phone, mail, etc.).

Family-Focused Approach: Evangelization and Faith Formation

- The Christian family is the Domestic Church. Parents are the primary educators in the faith. Engaging and involving parents and families in faith formation and discipleship growth has long been recognized but has been a challenge to implement. The Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan recognized the importance of taking next steps with family faith formation. The coming year is a perfect time to take a next step with creativity and flexibility. Consider how to engage families together in simple and intentional ways.
- **The Office of Formation and Discipleship (OFD) recommends that parishes consider offering an adapted, family-focused approach for faith formation that relies on virtual gatherings of families with catechists combined with at-home, in-person prayer and activities among family members. Virtual gatherings can be adapted to modified, in-person gatherings where possible.**
- OFD is providing a specific initiative, ***Families Forming Disciples***, at no cost to parishes. More information about the *Families Forming Disciples* approach is available [here](#), with suggested lesson plans for interested parishes available [here](#).
- Be flexible this year and adapt children/youth faith formation efforts to the circumstances, being mindful of the increasing burdens on parents. (Please note: *Families Forming Disciples* does not expect parents to be expert catechists but presumes the supportive role of parish catechists with the goal of helping more families pray together in their homes.)

- Keep in mind that a family-focused approach engages the needs of adult faith formation and can complement other efforts of youth ministry, adult faith formation, senior adult ministry, etc.
- Sacramental preparation should be planned for distinctly, but consider ways to complement and integrate efforts that include family participation (parents, grandparents, guardians, etc.).
- Further recommendations to consider simplicity, flexibility, technology needs, etc. for this year are available on the [Planning Ahead webpage](#).

Adult Faith Formation/Ministry, incl. Senior Adult Ministry

- Decisions about in-person/on-site gatherings with adults and senior adults should include considerations of adult responsibility as well as increased vulnerability. All the requirements for physical distancing, facial coverings, etc. as outlined below and in accordance with local, state, and health guidelines apply.
- Be creative with family-focused and intergenerational approaches.
- Be aware of the needs and concerns of the community.

Forms & Waiver – Assumption of Risk

- All required [forms](#) should still be on file for the faith formation year. See [safe environment guidance for online contact with youth](#) for more details on the use of online/virtual platforms and the required permission-to-contact-youth form.
- Families are required to complete an “assumption of risk” form for any minor participating in an on-site faith formation/youth ministry program or event at the parish. The assumption of risk form to be used is from the Archdiocese and is available at <https://archatl.com/come-holy-spirit-fill-and-renew-us/frequently-asked-questions/>.
- Employees or adult volunteers involved with on-site formation/ministry who are uncomfortable with coming on-site due to COVID-19-related concerns need to inform their supervisors of their concerns. Our archdiocesan HR department will assist regarding how to proceed.

Encounter, Accompaniment, and Hospitality

- This year will not look the same as previous years. In a way, this is a reminder of the pastoral and missionary conversion our Holy Father has emphasized. “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* [EG], no. 33). Even if our ministry and service look different, the daily encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ remains paramount (see EG, no. 3), as does the call to be a Church centered on mission, on “going forth.”
- “The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice.... An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others” (EG, no. 24).

- As plans and adaptations develop, keep in mind the centrality of the encounter with Jesus for any evangelization and faith formation efforts.
- Also, keep in mind the importance of accompaniment, being able to walk alongside those to/with whom we minister. During a time of increasing isolation, distance, and loneliness, our efforts should seek to foster personal interaction, even when in-person gatherings are limited or not possible.
- Related to both encounter and accompaniment is the importance of hospitality. Facial coverings/masks and physical (“social”) distancing present challenges to our parishes’ hospitality efforts. Nevertheless, it is more important than ever to keep in mind what St. Benedict wrote in his rule for monastic life almost 1,500 years ago: “Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for he is going to say, ‘I came as a guest, and you received me’ (Mt 25:35).” For more information on advancing hospitality efforts from a mission/evangelization perspective, see <https://www.evangelizationatl.com/till-the-soil>.

Considerations for In-Person/On-Site Gatherings

Please note: The considerations below presume that any in-person/on-site gathering will necessarily require modification in view of current concerns with COVID-19. Where remote/virtual options are possible as a supplement or alternative, parishes are still strongly encouraged to utilize such options.

Health & Safety Parameters

- Decisions to offer in-person/on-site gathering need to be consistent with current guidelines from local, state, and health officials, in addition to guidelines offered by the Archdiocese. **If using Catholic school facilities, protocols established by the school must be followed.**
- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- GA Dept. of Public Health: <https://dph.georgia.gov/>
- Archdiocese updates: <https://archatl.com/come-holy-spirit-fill-and-renew-us/>

Gathering Capacity

- Capacity depends upon the space and distance requirements. Follow the current local/state guidelines for gatherings in order to limit the number of participants appropriately and allow for proper physical distancing within designated spaces.
- Utilize spaces that will maximize appropriate physical distancing and can also be adequately cleaned and sanitized. Consider using outdoor facilities or larger well-ventilated areas when possible, safe, and practical.
- Consider a model that involves rotating groups at different times or different weeks based on the number of participants, facility considerations, and the number of catechists, team members, etc. available.

- Generally, smaller groups of 25 or less should be the aim, though it ultimately depends on the space and location, which may necessitate a smaller number or may allow for a larger number depending on the capacity for physical distancing and proper sanitation. Larger parish events of 50+ people gathering in one location, outside of Mass, **should be avoided per the governor's state of emergency executive order.**

Planning for Participation / Arrival & Departure

- Have a plan for orderly arrival and departure that maintains appropriate physical distancing and facial covering/mask wearing in transit to the meeting/session space.
- Self-screening and parent-screening for symptoms of COVID-19 (including temperature screening) should take place prior to arrival.
 - These symptoms include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
 - Those who exhibit any of these symptoms should not participate.
 - When in doubt about symptoms or possible exposure to COVID-19, families and individuals should stay home and not participate.
 - **Individuals who are pending a COVID-19 test result for themselves or for those living in their household should not participate in sessions or meetings.**
- Parishes are not required to screen symptoms but should ask all parents and caregivers to take responsibility (providing a report if requested). For parishes that choose to screen participants' temperature, a non-contact thermometer should be used, and temperatures should be screened prior to joining the group. Those with a temperature of 100.0 or over (or lower and not feeling well) should return home.
- Take attendance and maintain attendance records for contact tracing purposes.
- Try to minimize physical contact with the facility as much as possible.
- Provide easy access to hand sanitizing/handwashing stations on-site; good hygiene should be promoted, and parents are key partners.

During Session/Event

- Maintain physical distancing during a session/event, from arrival to departure. Individuals (or family groups) should be seated at least six (6) feet apart.
- Utilize assigned seating and assigned small groups if it is a reasonable help to minimize contacts. The use of smaller groups or cohorts can assist if contact tracing is necessary.
- Facial coverings/masks **should be worn at all times indoors by minors and adults (according to CDC guidelines) during a session/event.** When outside, masks may be removed only if physical distancing can continue **(six [6] feet or more).** When seated inside with physical distancing, masks **should still be worn.** **It is recommended that catechists wear masks at all times (ten feet, when possible, is a recommended distance when speaking to a group without a mask).** Parishes should assist, if necessary, with the **procurement of masks for employees and volunteers.** (Please be mindful and follow any

local ordinances as necessary. The below considerations in consult with the Office of Catholic Schools may be helpful for parish adaptation.)

- Developmentally appropriate communication regarding masking can provide reassurance and reduce anxiety among individuals. Masks are not dangerous to wear for long periods of time. However, they can be uncomfortable.
 - 2 year olds should not be masked.
 - 3 year olds should be masked in common areas. Suggest “building up” time with the mask as necessary.
 - 4 year olds and older should continue to wear masks.
- If food is offered at any event, it should be eaten outside. Avoid eating indoors with groups of people. Have pre-packaged boxes or bags for each attendee (or BYO meals), instead of a buffet or family-style meal. Avoid serving food from common dishes. Encourage frequent handwashing/sanitizing.
- Try to limit physical contact with surfaces, such as doors and door handles, as much as possible and encourage the use of hand sanitizer after touching any surfaces.

Cleaning Before & After Sessions

- Allow time before and after sessions for proper cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces (e.g., door handles, light switches, sink handles) and facilities, including meeting rooms/classrooms, common areas, bathrooms, etc.
- CDC recommendations for cleaning and sanitizing procedures are available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>
- If the space is shared with a school, be sure that the sanitizing procedure is in accord with the plan for that building (consult with school leadership on this matter).
- Avoid the use of shared items and materials (pencils, books, etc.) as much as possible.

‘Tactile’ Methods of Catechesis

- Forms of evangelization and catechesis that utilize especially tactile methodology, such as Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS), should be carefully structured to meet the above considerations.
- Parishes who offer CGS are encouraged to continue to find ways to do so and can consult CGS at <https://www.cgsusa.org/homepage/covid-19-response/>.
- Consider smaller group sizes and individualized plans for participants to allow necessary physical distancing.
- Consider limiting activities available in a given session.
- Perhaps even consider one extra person to discreetly sanitize items during sessions.
- Shared items that cannot be sanitized should not be used.

Retreats, Camps, and Similar Events

- Retreats, camps, and similar experiences often provide powerful encounters with the Lord and with one another.
- Parishes considering hosting retreats and other similar events involving longer time and use of space need to take into account the concerns and requirements/recommendations

noted above. Where remote/virtual options are possible, these should be considered, particularly if parents/families have concerns. Hosting such experiences will require a greater degree of monitoring and supervision to ensure that all necessary state, local, health, and Archdiocesan guidelines are followed. As with other events, pastor approval is necessary.

- Parishes considering the use of offsite camps should ensure that all necessary state, local, and health guidelines are being followed. Parents/families should also be consulted, with the pastor making the final decision about possible parish involvement.

Sports and Other Activities

- Sports and activities such as scouting can be part of a parish's comprehensive youth ministry and as such contribute to pre/evangelizing outreach as well as ongoing formation.
- Decisions about sports and other activities that might normally take place on parish grounds will be at the discretion of the pastor and in accord with local, state, and health guidelines. Parishes that have schools should coordinate with the school and the Office of Catholic Schools to avoid conflicting policies.
- Parishes with pre-existing sporting programs can benefit from consulting the Office of Catholic Schools, CDC recommendations, and Catholic Metro Sports (CMS) plans. For more information from CMS, go to <https://clubs.bluesombrero.com/catholic-metrosports>.

Positive Diagnosis of COVID-19 & Cases of Exposure

- Develop a process for diagnosed cases and cases of exposure within parish facilities, consulting latest [Archdiocesan guidance](#) and local, state, and health guidance. **See updated quarantine protocol for Archdiocesan employees [here](#) on p. 63f., which can serve as a helpful reference.**
- Notify local health officials and follow their recommendations with such cases.
- All necessary quarantine and/or isolation requirements need to be followed by all affected staff, volunteers, and participants/families. This includes a 14-day quarantine for those exposed to a positive case of COVID-19 (even for those who have been exposed but receive a negative test result within the 14-day quarantine—note that day 10 of the quarantine **or within days 7-10** is currently the recommended time for testing **for those without symptoms; those with symptoms are encouraged to be tested as soon as possible**). For specific guidelines, see <https://dph.georgia.gov/contact>.
- **Individuals who are pending a COVID-19 test result for themselves or for those living in their household should not participate in sessions or meetings.**
- Individuals with a positive COVID-19 diagnosis should not return until cleared by a medical provider and/or until all necessary requirements for quarantine, isolation, and relief of symptoms have been fulfilled (see [Archdiocesan guidance](#), [GA Dept. of Public Health](#), and [CDC](#)).
- Those who have been exposed to COVID-19 should be asked to quarantine for 14 days as current [GA Dept. of Public Health](#)/CDC guidelines prescribe.

- All those who may have been exposed to COVID-19 at a given meeting or session are to be notified, while maintaining the confidentiality of the individuals diagnosed.
- Facilities should be properly sanitized and disinfected, according to CDC recommendations. Below are considerations for schools that can be adapted for parish use in the case of an identified sickness:
 - Close off areas used by sick person. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation if possible. Wait 24 hours or as long as practicable before cleaning and disinfecting. After 24 hours vacuum the empty space if needed using a vacuum with a high-efficiency HEPA filter. Turn off HVAC to room to avoid spread of particles. **If the identified case is reported seven (7) or more days after the space was used,** additional cleaning and disinfecting is not necessary (CDC).