



OFFICE OF LAY MINISTRY AND PARISH FAITH FORMATION
ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALBANY

**TO: Pastors and Parish Life Coordinators
Catechetical and Youth Ministry Leaders**

**FROM: David Amico
Director**

**SUBJECT: Initial Guidance on Safe Reopening of Faith Formation and
Youth Ministry Programs Fall 2020**

DATE: June 10, 2020

**CC: Very Revered Robert Longobucco
Vicar General/Vicar for Catholic Faith Formation and Education**

The attached document, *Reopening Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Spaces* provides parishes with a series of initial questions to consider regarding the operational aspects of their faith formation and youth ministry programs in light of the ongoing reality of COVID-19 that will most likely extend into the 2020-2021 catechetical year.

It is our hope that pastors and parish life coordinators and catechetical/youth ministry leaders will use these questions to guide their conversations about planning for the fall and beyond.

An additional document will soon be forthcoming. It will provide guidance and suggestions regarding approaches, models, and resources for faith formation/youth ministry during these unprecedented times.

Please know that our entire staff is available to assist in any way possible. Please contact us by phone at (518) 453-6670 or email david.amico@rcda.org, erin.muir@rcda.org.

Let us continue to hold one another in prayer.

Mary, Mother of God, Health of the Sick, pray for us!

The Safe Re-Opening of Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Programs
Preliminary Operational Considerations
June 10, 2020

Parishes across the diocese are beginning to ponder what shape and form faith formation and youth ministry programs might take in the fall and beyond. Specific guidance from civic authorities and agencies about such gatherings is still under development. Such guidance could include recommendations - or even requirements - on matters like face masks, capacity limits, social distancing, etc. Based on these, the diocese may also issue its own guidelines for the reopening of spaces used by faith formation/youth ministry programs, just as it has done for the reopening of our worship spaces.

This guide offers parishes some **initial considerations** to use in planning for the **operational aspects** of their faith formation/youth ministry programs in light of the ongoing reality of COVID-19. These considerations presume that: 1.) we will be able to physically gather in some fashion this fall and beyond, and 2.) there will be ongoing some type of COVID-19 safety requirements.

Obviously, we do not yet know if we will be allowed to gather or what type of safety requirements will need to be in place. More definitive guidance from New York State regarding schools will help our planning.

This planning should be a collaborative effort between the pastor/parish life coordinator, the catechetical/youth ministry leader(s), and other relevant staff or volunteers (e.g. maintenance, parish pandemic safety officer, etc.). The most recent diocesan guidelines on the reopening of worship spaces, found on the [coronavirus page](#) of the diocesan website, may serve as a helpful reference at this time.

Operational Aspects for Consideration in Regard to COVID-19

- If required, will social distancing actually be possible in the physical space(s) where faith formation/youth ministry programs are held?
- How could program scheduling be creatively adjusted in light of social distancing, or possible building capacity limits, or possible limits of 10 children/youth in a class? For example, holding half the program one week, the other half the following week or some meet in person while others meet virtually.
- What other adjustments to operating procedures may be required, if there can be no large group prayer time/other activities, no intermingling of classes, etc.
- Will the usual entrance and exit procedures work in light of social distancing requirements?
- How can social distancing be maintained in other potentially highly populated spaces such as hallways, restrooms, and so forth?
- Will the spaces used for faith formation/youth ministry be cleaned before programs begin in the fall?
- How will any required cleaning procedures in all relevant spaces be accomplished after program sessions?
- If other groups use the same spaces as faith formation/youth ministry, will there be any impact on social distancing, cleaning, etc.?
- Will sufficient hand sanitizer be available? Masks for those who forget them?
- In addition to accurate attendance records for children/youth, how will a record of others (parents, catechists, volunteers, etc.) be maintained in case there is a need for tracking by the county or state health department?

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- Who are the parishioners who could serve on a “faith formation/youth ministry reopening team” to assist in planning and carrying out any required tasks?
- What sort of additional training may be required for catechists and other volunteers?
- What approaches could be used to accommodate program participants with disabilities for whom social distancing, wearing of masks, etc. may be challenging?
- Knowing that parents will understandably be concerned for the health and safety of their families, what communication about the parish’s efforts to adhere to recommended or required guidelines will be taking place throughout the summer and into the fall?