

Introduction

Just a few months ago we entered the holy season of Lent. We gathered in our churches to receive ashes and begin our forty-day journey to Easter. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, this pandemic hit. We were told to “shelter in place,” practice “social distancing,” and wear a mask in public. Our churches – and just about everything else – shut down, and we received dispensation from our Sunday Mass obligation. We not only plunged into isolation, but also into new faith formation and youth ministry territory: the virtual world.

We scrambled for resources to continue ministry online and find new ways to stay connected with people. Livestreaming Mass became the norm in many parishes. We probably cannot now find many faith formation or youth ministry leaders who do not know what Zoom is or how to use it. In three short months this pandemic has done what many church leaders and experts in catechesis and youth ministry have urged us to do for some 10-15 years.

For many people, our efforts helped them pray, worship, learn, laugh, cry, discuss, ponder, grow, connect, and encounter Jesus in their space, in their homes, individually and with their family. For others, our efforts fed a dormant or rumbling hunger for God that helped them remember and re-member themselves to their faith roots. For still others, the very absence of our “normal” ministry, coupled with our efforts to continue it in new ways, deepened their appreciation of the beauty of our Catholic faith and its meaning in their lives.

Many yearn for a return to normalcy. We want to be able to gather once again in our churches to celebrate the sacraments. We want to be able to gather our children, youth, families, and adults for faith formation and for ministry programs. We want to be able to gather freely once again without worry or fear. Given the nature of this virus, however, none of this will be possible for the foreseeable future. What shall we do in the meantime? What happens now?

This resource is offered to assist ministry leaders in planning for faith formation and youth ministry as we re-open our parishes. RCIA, the Overview of Faith Formation Principles section and the Guiding Principles in the Youth Ministry section may offer some insights for these ministry areas. For additional assistance in these areas, please contact the Office of Faith Formation or the Office of Liturgy (for the liturgical rites of the RCIA).

The staff of the Office of Faith Formation will make available a variety of webinars and resources, as well as individualized and cohort consultation and coaching services, to assist and support this planning.

Overview of Faith Formation Principles

There are many overarching principles that guide the ministry of faith formation. We find them in the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *National Directory for Catechesis*, as well as other catechetical documents. In the development of faith formation for the 2020-2021 year, we offer two main principles for consideration.

Baptismal Catechumenate

The *National Directory for Catechesis* reminds us that “the baptismal catechumenate¹ is the source of inspiration for all catechesis.”² In exploring this reality, we are reminded that “catechesis accompanies a continual conversion to Christ and an ongoing initiation into the celebration of the sacraments and the life of the Church.”³ We must also recall that the baptismal catechumenate “is a fruitful blend of instruction and formation in the faith; it progresses through gradual stages; it unfolds the Church’s rites, symbols, and biblical and liturgical signs; and it incorporates the catechumens into the Christian community of faith and worship.”⁴

In paragraph 75 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)*, we see that formation is to be accommodated to the liturgical year, apprentices one into the Christian way of life, is supported by liturgical rites, and yields apostolic witness. In paragraph 244 of the *RCIA*, we are challenged, in the context of post-baptismal catechesis, to help individuals “grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal Mystery and in making it a part of their lives through meditating on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist and doing the works of charity.”⁵ Finally, we hear in Acts 2: 42 that “they devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.”⁶

These three quotes, along with those from the *National Directory for Catechesis*, offer us a road map and framework for catechesis. Our catechesis and faith formation should have as its goal the formation of disciples, who are engaged in the life of the parish and wider community, participate in liturgical celebrations, and have a deep relationship with Christ.

Parents as Primary Educators

We also know that the Church teaches that parents are “by word and example ... the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children.”⁷ As ministry leaders, we have recognized the importance of the role of the family in handing on faith. Often, though, we share this information with parents and meet resistance as many parents do not feel qualified or knowledgeable enough to hand on the faith.

Inviting parents to embrace this principle encourages them to share the daily activities of living the faith. It is true that “faith is caught, not taught.” Pope Paul VI said it best in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”⁸ Parents may not need to be teachers, because they are already witnesses.

¹ For those unfamiliar with the Baptismal Catechumenate, please reference the entire section on the Baptismal Catechumenate in the *National Directory for Catechesis* (35.D), as well as the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. An overview of the process may be located on the diocesan website at <https://www.davenportdiocese.org/ocia-formation>.

² *National Directory for Catechesis*, 35.D

³ *National Directory for Catechesis*, 35.D

⁴ *National Directory for Catechesis*, 35.D

⁵ RCIA 244

⁶ Acts 2:42

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1656.

⁸ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41.

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As parish leaders, we are called to partner with parents to aid them in the task of handing on faith and supplement what is occurring in the home. We must remind them of the power of their witness of faith.

In this time of re-visioning our faith formation approaches for the 2020-2021 year, it is important to keep these two principles in mind. For additional information on these Faith Formation Principles or how to apply them to your ministry, please contact the Office of Faith Formation.

Overview of “Protocols for Chancery and Parish Staff – Work Locations, Meetings and Travel”

These recommendations consider the “Protocols for Chancery and Parish Staff – Work Locations, Meetings and Travel” of the Diocese of Davenport and must be read in light of the protocols set forth in that document.

In Step One, faith formation and youth ministry sessions should be held virtually.

In Step Two, faith formation and youth ministry sessions should continue to be held virtually. In-person sessions may take place outdoors if safe distances and face protection are maintained. Indoor sessions of fewer than thirty minutes may be held if proper distancing and face protection are maintained.

In Step Three, faith formation and youth ministry should occur virtually. In-person sessions may take place outdoors if safe distances are maintained. Indoor sessions of fewer than sixty minutes may be held if proper distancing and face protection are maintained.

The decision to hold in-person sessions, in keeping with Diocesan protocols, is made by the pastor in consideration of the current pandemic activity in the area and the needs of the parish. If in-person sessions are offered, not all parents may agree to have their child(ren) take part and an alternative model of faith formation or youth ministry should be made available to them.

Thus, it is the recommendation of the Office of Faith Formation that parishes develop and implement provisions for a non-gathered or virtual approach to faith formation and youth ministry for the 2020-2021 year. In-person sessions may be held or added if safety precautions are maintained according to the Step in progress and the Diocesan safe environment requirements are followed. Sessions may also occur off of parish property, including private homes, with the prior written permission of the pastor or parish life coordinator.

We live in challenging times which call us to be flexible in our approach to faith formation and youth ministry. If a resurgence of the pandemic occurs, we need to be ready to modify our plan and adapt to the current situation while keeping students, families and faith formation and youth ministry personnel safe.

Models of Faith Formation for the 2020-2021 Year

A “traditional” classroom-based model for faith formation, where students gather weekly at the parish with a catechist, is not preferred at this time.

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In all recommended models, parishes are encouraged to provide families with the *Prayers for Transitional Kindergarten Through 8th Grade Students* booklet, available on the [Diocesan Website](#),⁹ or a similar parish-designed booklet and invite parents to work with their children on learning our formal prayers.

In addition to the prayer booklet, eight models of recommended faith formation are described below. These eight models are categorized as Family Faith Formation, Textbook-Based or Parish-Designed.

Parishes are invited to discern the needs of their community, selecting one (or more) model(s) to implement. Parishes may combine elements of multiple models, select a different model for different age groups or elect to offer multiple models for a particular age group. Parishes should consult individually with families of special needs students to adapt formation to meet the abilities of students and families.

These models include online opportunities and home-based opportunities. In the discernment process, parishes should evaluate the technology resources of families, as well as the parish. Only two of the models require Internet connectivity and technology. The other six models may utilize online resources but could also be implemented without an online component. Parishes may need to identify alternate delivery methods for resources to families who do not have access to technology/Internet connectivity.

The Office of Faith Formation is available to talk with parishes regarding discernment, adaptation for special needs families, and individual questions.

The following models of faith formation are recommended:

A. Family Faith Formation Models

1. Family-Based Diocesan Curriculum

- a. The Office of Faith Formation will provide an outline for home-based, parent/family led formation each month. This will include a theme, learning objectives, key points to cover and catechism/scripture references.
- b. Resources and activities to support the theme will be provided by the Office of Faith Formation.
- c. Resources for weekly Breaking Open the Word will be included.
- d. Parishes may elect to utilize the provided resources/activities or develop their own to support the theme.
- e. An accountability “project” will be part of each month’s material.
- f. The Curriculum Plan will be available by August 1st and resources to support each month’s theme will be available at least 30 days in advance (e.g. September resources available by August 1st).

2. Family-Based Catechesis

- a. Parish provides a digital playlist and material for use in the home around a theme per week/month.

⁹ The Prayer Booklet is available in [booklet](#) and [single-page](#) formats to facilitate printing. It is also available in Spanish in [booklet](#) and [single-page](#) formats.

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- b. The development of this material is solely determined by the parish; however, it is recommended that the parish partner with the Office of Faith Formation to ensure that a comprehensive curriculum approach is being maintained.
 - c. Accountability is recommended in some form.
 3. Building the Domestic Church
 - a. In this model, the parish focuses on partnering with parents to strengthen the domestic church. Rather than a focus on children, this model focuses on parents. Adult formation opportunities will be key and develop parental confidence in sharing the faith at home.
 - b. Activities and resources are to assist parents in creating an environment of prayer and faith in the home, as well as support them in having faith conversations with their children.
 - c. Parishes selecting this model would be encouraged to partner with the Office of Faith Formation in developing/identifying resources.
 4. Breaking Open the Word
 - a. The parish provides families with resources to Break Open the Sunday scriptures each week.
 - b. Faith activities are recommended and are provided to families by the parish.
 - c. There is no accountability for this model.
 - d. Parishes selecting this model would be encouraged to partner with the Office of Faith Formation to adopt a model of catechesis containing doctrinal content for the 2021-2022 year.
- B. Textbook-Based Models
 5. Online Curriculum ****Technology/Internet Required****
 - a. Parishes purchase the resources, the DRE/CRE serves as the administrator for the account, and catechists may assist in the management of individual grade levels/classes.
 - b. Students and parents work through the online lessons.
 - c. DRE/CRE/catechist monitors progress via the online portal and reviews submissions.
 - d. Accountability is monitored through the online portal.
 6. Textbook-Based Curriculum with Parents as Primary Catechists
 - a. Parish provides families with the textbook for their child's grade level and resources for parents to work with the material.
 - b. Accountability is recommended in some form.

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7. Textbook-Based Curriculum with Catechists virtually gathering with students
Technology/Internet Required
 - a. Parish provides families with the textbook for their child's grade level and catechists will gather virtually with students on a weekly basis to break open the material.
 - b. A "flipped-classroom" approach is recommended, with students reviewing the lesson prior to a virtual gathering. Catechists will be encouraged to spend their gathered time engaging students in reflecting on the material, rather than formally teaching the material.
 - c. Safe Environment Guidelines for virtual gatherings with students are forthcoming and need to be followed.
 - d. Accountability is through the student's participation in the virtual gatherings.

C. Parish-Designed Model

8. Parishes are invited to create their own non-gathered plan for formation. Dialogue with the Office of Faith Formation is recommended in the process.

For further information on these recommended models and guidance in the discernment process, please contact the Office of Faith Formation.

Immediate Preparation for the Reception of Sacraments for the 2020-2021 Year

Preparation for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation will involve a separate process. Modifications to the ways in which preparation is offered may be necessary for this year. Therefore, parishes, while not neglecting preparation, are reminded of the canonical minimum requirements for receiving the sacraments worthily:

- Reconciliation: "To receive the salvific remedy of the sacrament of penance, a member of the Christian faithful must be disposed in such a way that, rejecting sins committed and having a purpose of amendment, the person is turned back to God."¹⁰ In addition, "as long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, the person may receive sacramental absolution."¹¹
- Eucharist: "The administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children requires that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so that they understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity and are able to receive the Body of Christ with faith and devotion."¹² In addition, the "criterion for reception of Holy Communion is ... namely that the person be able to 'distinguish the body of Christ from ordinary food.'"¹³

¹⁰ *Code of Canon Law*, 987.

¹¹ *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 28.

¹² *Code of Canon Law*, 913.1.

¹³ *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 22.

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- Confirmation: All baptized Catholics who possess the use of reason may receive the Sacrament of Confirmation if they are “suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew the baptismal promises.”¹⁴ In addition, “to receive Confirmation one must be in a state of grace.”¹⁵
 - While the [Confirmation Standards for the Diocese of Davenport](#) are not set aside, it is understood that the 2020-2021 year is unique and accommodations will be necessary.

Parishes are encouraged to contact the Office of Faith Formation for additional guidance for the preparation to receive sacraments.

Guidelines for Youth Ministry for the 2020-2021 Year

A “traditional” youth ministry model primarily focused on gathering groups of young people for programs and events is not preferred at this time.

Unlike faith formation, youth ministry is not curriculum-based. Youth ministry seeks to respond to the needs and lives of younger and older adolescents, seeking to form them as missionary disciples through a multi-dimensional and multi-component approach, primarily articulated in the 1997 USCCB document *Renewing the Vision – A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*. As such, this resource offers no specific model options, as does the faith formation section, but rather offers a process for planning a comprehensive non-gathered model for youth ministry. Additionally, the Office of Faith Formation offers individual or group consultation, training, and support services to assist parish youth ministry leaders in this task.

1. Develop a mindset for planning. Planning for ministry in this time of pandemic is not a matter of trying to figure out how to take weekly youth group, youth nights, or other programs and transfer them online. We have the opportunity to think more intentionally about the needs of our young people, parents and families, as well as the goals for our parish youth ministry, and to be much more intentional about how we approach them in this coming year. Before thinking about what to do this year, take some time to develop a mindset about parish youth ministry for this year. Reflect on these questions (and write down your answers to them):
 - a. *Given all that has happened these past few months, how are the youth in my parish doing right now, and how do I think they will be doing when school begins again in August? (Ask the same question about parents, and families.)*
 - b. *In light of my reflection on the above question, what do the youth (parents, families) in my parish need in their lives personally, socially, religiously and spiritually?*
 - c. *In light of my reflection on both of the above questions, what is the Holy Spirit saying to me about our parish youth ministry in the coming year? (Take this to prayer, and do not skip this step! Remember that the answers may not come quickly, or all at once.)*
 - d. *Finally, what is/are the goal(s) in the coming year for our parish youth ministry for young people (for parents, for families)?*

¹⁴ Code of Canon Law, 889.

¹⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1310.

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2. Adopt Guiding Principles. Recognizing that every parish is different, with different student numbers, expertise, and resources, consider adopting some or all of these Guiding Principles for planning your youth ministry.
 - a. *Remember these key words: accompaniment, encounter with Jesus, discipleship.* The Emmaus story is our guiding image for youth ministry. We accompany others, listening to their struggles and joys, sharing in their journey, building a relationship of love and trust, and proclaiming the kerygma of Jesus' death and resurrection and its saving grace. We point them to Jesus so that they might encounter him in their lives. Our aim in all this is to dispose them to discipleship and follow the way of Jesus. As we move to a predominantly online ministry for this coming year, it is important to keep this in the forefront of our planning mindset.
 - b. *Increase emphasis on the domestic church.* This is a great opportunity to do more to support and equip parents as leaders of their domestic church and in coping with this new reality of life. What might this look like? Imagine...
 - links on the parish or youth ministry webpage to articles on the spirituality of parenting;
 - "Table Talk Questions" sent weekly (bi-weekly or monthly) to parents to use when the family gathers for a meal;
 - a parent support group for learning how to pray as a family;
 - short parent-made videos sharing strategies and best practices for coping with the "new normal."
 - c. *Think "personalized" rather than "one-size-fits-all."* Online ministry makes it somewhat easier to meet youth and parents wherever they are in their spiritual, religious, social, and learning needs and offer personalized approaches for them. What might this look like? Imagine...
 - a small group that wants to know more about St. Francis of Assisi;
 - a website with links to articles and videos on topics that are of interest to parents;
 - social media devotionals or inspirational messages sent out daily (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) to those who sign up for them;
 - a weekly (bi-weekly, monthly) prayer night for those who are interested in praying with others;
 - an early morning breakfast club or "coffee talk" for those who want to start out their day by connecting with each other, etc.
 - d. *Think more "small groups" and less "y'all come" opportunities.* (Similar to "b." above.) You can do large group gatherings online, and, depending on your parish resources and youth ministry leadership, this may be all you really can do. But, if you stop and think about it, small groups can be a bit easier to manage depending on the number of students involved. Remember, ministry is all about relationships, and it is easier to build trust and foster relationships in small groups.
 - e. *Think "shorter time frame."* Unless you provide a lot of variety and keep it moving, it is better to "leave them wanting more." If youth group nights go for 90 minutes, consider

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planning the online version for no more than 60. If the gathered Confirmation prep session is an hour long, plan the online version for 45 minutes.

- f. *Think both “time-specific” and “24x7x365.”* You will probably want some of what you plan to be consistent (weekly, every other week, etc.) so that folks can count on it. But also think about what you can make available for folks to access whenever they can or want to. This is where a dedicated resource website or webpages on your parish/youth ministry website is very useful.
 - g. *Communicate regularly with parents.* You know you need to communicate regularly with young people, but, as ministry moves online, it is even more important to stay connected with parents. This communication is not just about what is coming up for their teens, but it is also about how they are doing, how their kids are doing, and getting their perspective and feedback on what you are doing. For example, you could send a monthly email, text, or post card to parents that contains an inspirational note, a parenting tip, a question that you would like them to respond to, or a reminder of an upcoming program for their child. Here is an opportunity to build or strengthen a relationship with parents. Take advantage of it!
 - h. *Develop or broaden your ministry team!* Moving online opens up all kinds of possibilities for others to share their gifts and passions and involve them in ministry...without ever having to even be in a room with young people! Ministry does not need a Lone Ranger. Even Jesus gathered a team of twelve. Do not go down this road alone. What might this look like? Imagine...
 - finding someone who’s an “expert” on social media platforms (i.e., they use it A LOT) and empowering them to coordinate your social media strategy to stay more connected with youth and parents;
 - enlisting a musician, someone else who loves to lead prayer, a couple of people (teens maybe) who are good with technology, and someone outgoing with emcee skills, to be your youth night team;
 - inviting some of your parish’s homebound to write and send teens (and maybe even parents) birthday and/or sacrament anniversary cards.
3. **Begin Planning.** Congratulations! You have your mindset and chosen your guiding principles. Planning will now be much easier and more fruitful.
- a. Review your reflections from *Step 1: Develop a mindset for planning*. Ask yourself: *“What are the most pressing needs of youth (parents, families) of my parents that need attention?”* All of the needs are probably important but keep reminding yourself that you are trying to identify those that need a lot of attention. Make a list.
 - b. For each identified need, now ask yourself: *“How can our parish youth ministry respond to or address that need? What could we do?”* Make a list for each need, and (this is important) list any idea – no matter how silly or unrealistic it is – that pops into your head. Now is NOT the time to evaluate your ideas. Strive for as long a list as you can for each need.
 - c. Next, take your lists and evaluate each of the possible ideas, keeping the ones that you think are possible, could effectively address its corresponding need, and that seem realistic for your parish and your youth ministry. Eliminate those that are unrealistic and less effective.

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- d. Pull out a calendar for September, October and November. Look over your pared-down evaluated list of ideas and place them on the calendar where you think they will be most appropriate. However, keep this in mind:
 - Not every idea will find a place on the calendar. More than likely (and hopefully) you will have ideas that have not yet found a place within these months. Great! Save the list for future planning.
 - Some of your ideas might not easily translate to a specific date. For instance, if you decide to start sending birthday cards to your teens, that is a continuous, year-long strategy. Break this strategy out into pieces. First, develop a list of your teens, their birthdays, and their addresses and place this on the calendar for the first two weeks of September. Next, during the last two weeks of September, recruit people into this ministry. And so on.
- e. Once your calendar is complete, check for balance and connection to your purpose and goals, then adjust accordingly. Go back to your “Guiding Principles” and, depending on those you have adopted, ask yourself...
 - *Is there too much in one week, one month, or over the three months?* Remember: do not bite off more than you can chew. Be realistic. More often than not, less is more.
 - *Is there a balance between “small group” and “y’all come,” “personalized” and “one-size-fits-all,” “time-specific” and “24x7x365” opportunities?* Ensure you have a variety of opportunities.
 - *Does most or all of this help us accompany our people better, help our people encounter Jesus, help form them for discipleship?* If something does not seem to connect to these three, consider changing it or be sure to have a good reason to do it.
 - *Does most or all of this reflect our goals?* If it does not, consider not doing it.
- f. The final step in the planning is to take each idea and fill in the details. If there is a youth night on your schedule, develop it. If you need to recruit people for your birthday card ministry, plan how you will do that.
- g. As you implement the first three months of your calendar, begin planning for the next few months, repeating this process for each “season.” Adjust your plans according the condition of the pandemic.

Conclusion

There has been much talk about getting “back to normal.” As we begin to re-open, however, it seems more likely that “normal” as we have known it will never return, and a “new normal” will emerge. Faith formation and youth ministry that depend solely or primarily on gathering people for programs will most likely evolve as a result of the modifications we need to make now. To borrow some science fiction terminology, our ministry has entered a new dimension, for we have begun to go where few have gone before.

A new journey awaits. Let us embrace this adventure with joy!