

# Diocese of Scranton Guidelines for Faith Formation Programs During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The Diocese of Scranton is pleased that many aspects of parish life have safely returned to normal as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. While planning for the 2021-2022 faith formation year, parishes must continue to prioritize the safety and health of all students, parents, staff and volunteers.

Each parish is unique in both its space and the number of students enrolled in its faith formation programs. Parish staffs are encouraged to remain flexible in their planning, use creativity and exercise compassion in meeting the needs of their community.

Parishes continue to have flexibility in the approach in which they offer faith formation programs during the 2021-2022 school year. Parishes can select one of the following options:

- Onsite/In-Person Faith Formation Classes
- Virtual or Online Faith Formation Classes
- Hybrid Approach, combining both virtual and in-person elements of faith formation

Below are a list of preventative measures to be instituted across all religious education programs in the Diocese of Scranton if parishes plan to hold any in-person faith formation classes:

## **PREVENTION MEASURES**

**Masks:** We are called to provide a Culture of Safety for our children and youth. Because most religious education students are not yet eligible for vaccinations – and in an effort to ensure in-person religious education is able to continue to the best extent possible – the Diocese of Scranton will require masks for students involved in its parish faith formation programs at this time. Masks are an effective tool in mitigating the spread of COVID-19, particularly when there is a large population of unvaccinated individuals.

**Indoor settings** – Masks must be worn consistently and correctly by all minors and adults, regardless of vaccination status, while attending any religious education classes indoors. Parishes can have disposable masks available in case a need arises.

**Outdoor settings** – Masks do not need to be worn in most outdoor settings. Masks must be worn in crowded outdoor settings or during any activities that involve sustained close contact with other people.

If a student/family is uncomfortable with returning to an onsite/in-person faith formation program for any reason, parishes are urged to work directly with the student/family and make reasonable accommodations, which might include the possibility of online or individualized meetings and/or providing resource packets for pick-up.

This Diocesan guidance on masking for parish religious education programs is consistent with the protocols being implemented at all of the Diocese of Scranton's Catholic Schools. These protocols will be re-evaluated on a consistent basis and are subject to change at any time and will be communicated to parishes if adjustments are made.

Mask requirements will be determined in accordance with the county transmission metrics and guidance from various sources, which may include, but not limited to the CDC and PA Department of Health. The levels of transmission for a county are listed as Low, Moderate, Substantial and High found at <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>. When counties are in moderate, substantial or high, all individuals will be required to wear masks indoors. When a county is in a low community transmission rate for at least two weeks, masking may be optional for all. Anyone that is not vaccinated at that time, will still be encouraged to continue to mask indoors if desired.

**Vaccinations:** It is highly recommended that everyone who is eligible be fully vaccinated for COVID-19, whether that be a catechist or student of eligible age.

**Classroom Set-up/Distancing:** Classroom desks or tables should face in the same direction whenever possible and parishes should make every effort to maintain three feet of distancing while in a classroom setting.

**Cleaning and Disinfection:** Clean and disinfect classroom space and frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, sink handles and light switches with regularity. Parishes that utilize Catholic School buildings for space should work with the building principal to ensure sanitization.

**Hand Hygiene:** Encourage students to frequently wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer. Adequate healthy hygiene supplies/products should be available such as soap, hand sanitizer, paper towels, tissues and disinfectant wipes.

**Sickness:** All parents, employees, catechists and other volunteers should be educated about the importance of staying home when sick.

**COVID-19 Exposure:** The pastor or his delegate should immediately report any on-site exposure to COVID-19. Call Father John Polednak, Vicar for Clergy, at (570) 591-5006 and Father Polednak will help the parish on any potential next steps that might be necessary.

By instituting the above guidelines, the Diocese of Scranton is addressing the issues of greatest risk for students/families involved in onsite/in-person faith formation activities. Pastors are encouraged to use their discretion for any other specific questions that might arise regarding youth group or other parish activities (outside of Mass) at this time.

Working together, we hope to continue to reach out and accompany our students and families and invite them into an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ.