

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

Updated: February 28, 2022



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. Throughout the 2021-2022 faith formation year, the Diocese and its parishes have continued to prioritize the safety and health of all students, parents, staff and volunteers.

Parishes have had flexibility in the approach in which they could offer faith formation programs during the 2021-2022 school year. Parishes were able to 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 an updated 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: Beginning on Thursday, March 3, 2022, the Diocese of Scranton will move to a “Mask Recommended,” not required, policy for parish faith formation programs.

Parents are encouraged to discuss with their child(ren) expectations for masking at a time when the transition occurs. As caring and compassionate communities in which we model kindness, the decision of each family regarding this issue is to be respected.

Even after faith formation programs transition to masks being recommended, there will still be times when an individual might still be required to wear a mask. This would include an individual who is within ten days of a positive diagnosis or an individual who is identified as a close contact to a COVID case, but does not have to quarantine because she/he is either fully vaccinated or had a lab confirmed case of COVID in the last 90 days.

It is also important to note that at any time after the transition, the Diocese may return to a mask requirement if there is a spike in cases in the local community or parish.

Since protocols for faith formation programs were first established in August 2021, the Diocese of Scranton has stressed that if a student/family is uncomfortable with being in an onsite/in-person faith formation program for any reason, parishes are urged to work directly with the student/family to make reasonable accommodations, which might include the possibility of online or individualized meetings and/or providing resource packets for pick-up.

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.