



ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK
YOUTH FAITH FORMATION
Catechetical

To: Directors and Coordinators of Religious Education
 From: Sr. Joan Curtin, CND, Director of Archdiocesan Catechetical Office
 Re: Parish Religious Education for Children/Youth in Grades 1 to 8
 Date: June 2020 for September 2020 through May 2021

Attachments:

- Parish Agreement/Application for Participation in the Family-Based Parish Religious Education Approach
- Meeting Outline for Use of Director/Coordinator in Presenting Parish Family-Based Approach
- Safe Environment Regulations for use of Online Platforms

While you are working on your plans for the opening of parish religious education in September, we in the Catechetical Office are working on resources that can assist you. All of us are beginning to get a clearer understanding of the challenges that will face both schools and our own parish religious education programs. In various ways, we have already begun meeting these challenges—you at the parish level and we at the archdiocesan level. This letter will alert you to guidelines and resources that are basically “in place” but at the same time are being further developed and shaped to serve the needs of your parish religious education programs during this unprecedented time.

Program Structure

The religious education models introduced in the Fall of 2019 are proving to be providential and helpful, especially the models which combine onsite and online learning and directly involve the parents in their child’s catechetical experience. As you make your plans, please recognize that the likelihood for onsite parish religious education is not high unless the parish program is small. Given the realities of our current situation, we highly recommend that each parish consider the following two basic approaches to religious education:

- ***The Weekly Onsite Parish Religious Education Approach*** where it can be done safely and in accordance with all state requirements for social distancing and safety and following the directives of Archdiocesan authorities.
- ***The Family-Based Parish Religious Education Approach*** which combines at-home learning led by the parent and oversight by the pastor through the direction of the parish director/coordinator of religious education. A meeting between the parent and the parish director/coordinator every fourth week helps the parent prepare for the religious education sessions of the coming weeks. How this approach will be specifically implemented depends upon how the pastor and the director/coordinator shape the structure to meet the particular parish needs.

Basic Program Curriculum: Archdiocesan Guidelines

The basic curriculum for all programs is the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis, Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 6*, and those for Grades 7 and 8. The *Archdiocesan Guidelines* as the non-negotiable basis for all our programs will insure that the children and their families are receiving the essential content of our faith, along with its implications for Christian living, the spirituality that flows from it, and the Scripture and Church teaching that form its bedrock.

The updated *Guidelines for Grades 1 through 6* were completed in 2019 and the updated *Guidelines for Grades 7 and 8* are now in their final stages of completion.

Program Resources: Lesson plans for Guidelines and Publishers' Online Resources

In late August, you will receive lesson plans for each concept or “band” in the *Archdiocesan Guidelines, Grades 1 through 6*. These guidelines lesson plans are to be used in every grade level no matter which model and which publisher’s resources you have chosen.

In addition, during the course of the year, each parish program will continue to use the religious education text books and materials provided by the publishing company chosen by the director/coordinator and the pastor. These companies have responded to the “sheltering-in-place” demands of these past months by dedicating much expertise, creativity, labor, and funding to increasing their resources and capacities to serve families online.

Training of Directors and Coordinators

The Basic Leadership Training Course and the Advanced Leadership Program will be offered in variations of online and onsite formats depending on the responses that the corona virus pandemic will necessitate.

Training of Catechists

Catechist formation continues to be offered in online and virtual formats. The regional catechetical directors, in consultation with the directors and coordinators of their region, will offer the catechist formation courses according to local parish needs.

Assistance to You in the Implementation of Your Program

Sr. Joan and the central office staff of the Catechetical Office will continue to be present and available to you, providing direction and support

The regional catechetical director will continue to provide immediate direction as well as individual guidance to each director and coordinator in the region through regional meetings and individual contact by phone, email and web-based consults.

Project Inspiration, to which many of you have contributed, is provided as a source of practical ideas for the various implementation possibilities. It puts at your fingertips a compendium of how your colleagues throughout the Archdiocese are creatively implementing these approaches within the confines of their own parish needs.

Since the 2019 approval of additional models for parish religious education, the *Family Catechesis Advisory Committee* has been working diligently to provide you with practical resources for greater parent involvement in their children’s religious education. Although this committee could not have foreseen the pandemic and its

current effects, their materials will provide additional help and guidance for your September planning. The work of this committee has resulted in the attached **Parish Agreement/Application for Participation in Family-Based Parish Religious Education Approach**. I want to express great gratitude to the committee members: Sr. Nancy Elizabeth Doran, Chairperson, Margaret Hoblin, Sr. Mary Crucifix Pandullo, Sr. Zelide Ceccagno, Andrea Tighe, Janan Lane.

Directions for Maintaining a Safe Environment for Parish Religious Education in This Time of Covid-19 Pandemic

Please see the attached Document.

Outline for Introductory Presentation to the Parents in the Parish Religious Education Program On the Family-Based Parish Religious Education Model

Additional Resource for Director/Coordinator of Religious Education

The child's formation in the faith is carried out above all in the family, the parish community as we worship and serve, and the Parish Religious Education Program.

1. The Role of the Parent in the Faith-Life of Their Children

The Church recognizes the parent's crucial role in the faith-life of their children.

See *Archdiocesan Handbook for Parish Directors and Coordinators of Religious Education*: section on Family-Centered Catechesis, pages Fam-1 and Fam-3 to 4.

2. The Role of the Parish Community in Religious Education.

Participation in the Sunday liturgy is foundational to the development of the faith-life of the child.

In addition, the many ways the parish community responds to the Gospel and the many opportunities for service impact the child's growth as a disciple of Jesus.

See *Archdiocesan Handbook for Parish Directors and Coordinators of Religious Education*: section on Family-Centered Catechesis, page Fam-6 .

3. The Content of Religious Education

Authentic religious education must be faithful to the teachings of the Church. The U.S. Catholic Bishops have approved the content of certain major religious education textbooks by Catholic publishers which assure an orderly, thorough and faithful presentation using methods that are educationally sound and age appropriate. In addition, the Archdiocese of New York has developed Guidelines for Catechesis, for Grades K through 6 and for grade 7 and 8 which must be used by all Religious Education Programs and Parochial Schools.

4. Family-Based Parish Religious Education

Family-based Religious Education takes place under the authority of the Pastor through the direction of the Parish Religious Education Director. The faith is taught in the home by the parent, who is commissioned by the Pastor to be the Catechist for his/her own children.

The parent-catechist and the child/children are guided and supported by the Parish Religious Education structure throughout the instruction. The instruction consists in 90 minutes a week for 30 weeks offered from September through May.

Every month, the parent meets with the Director of Religious Education and is prepared to teach for the coming weeks. At the same time, the child meets with a parish Catechist to review and strengthen what has been learned at home.

The decision to accept the custodial parent/guardian's application to participate in the Family-Based Religious Education Model is made by the Pastor in consultation with the Parish Director of Religious Education.

Parish Name

**Family-Based Parish Religious Education Model
For Children and Youth in Grade Levels 1 through 8
For September 2020 through May 2021**

Agreement and Application

Parish Address

Parish Contact Information

Effective religious education is rooted in a deeply Catholic family life. The parents* form the faith of the child by recognizing the person of Jesus as the center of the family, by adhering to Gospel values and the teachings of the Church, by praying together regularly in the home, by participating in the sacramental life of the parish, especially the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy, and by participating in the life and mission of the parish and of the Church.

All formal parish religious education of children and youth is directed by the parish director of religious education under the authority of the pastor. Its purpose is to help the children/youth grow as loving disciples of Jesus, living their Catholic commitment within the community of His disciples that is the parish community.

Parish Religious Education faithfully provides the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church:

- 1) **By commissioning catechists approved by the pastor to teach the faith in the parish.**
The Catholic Church identifies six fundamental responsibilities of all Catechists: to teach the knowledge of the faith, to give moral formation, to provide liturgical education, to teach to pray, to educate for life in the parish community, and to help those being taught to understand that through their Baptism they are called to share in the mission of Jesus.
- 2) **By using textbooks and resources approved by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).**
In the Archdiocese of New York this is accomplished by following the *Archdiocesan Guidelines for Catechesis, Grades K through 6 and Grades 7 and 8*. Therefore, the parish director of religious education must select for the educational process, textbooks, and online materials that are in accord with these *Guidelines*.

For 2020-2021, the parish religious education program offers its families a choice between two basic models of systematic weekly religious education for children/youth in Grades 1 through 8. In both models, children/ should receive 90 minutes of religious education a week for 30 weeks from September through May. The required registration and tuition for Parish Religious Education remain the same for both models. The models are:

- 1) **The Weekly Onsite parish Religious Education Model:** the child attends weekly religious education sessions of 90 minutes each, given by parish-catechists at the parish, with continual supportive participation provided by the parents in the home.
- 2) **The Family-Based Parish Religious Education Model:** the child is given weekly religious education sessions by the Parent-Catechist in the home for a total of 90 minutes a week for 3 weeks. In the fourth week, the child and the parent-catechist go to the parish and attend a 90-minute session. During this session, parish-catechists teach the children; the director of religious education guides and teaches the parent.

If necessitated by the pandemic, these meetings can be done by phone or through online meetings.

N.B. In keeping with Safe Environment policy, these parent-catechists may only teach their own children.

**For the sake of brevity, only the word "parent" will be used throughout but the intent is to refer to either the parent or the guardian as the case may be.*

** The title "Director of Religious Education" is used throughout and refers to the Administrator of the Parish Religious Education Program whether that person be a Director or a Coordinator of Religious Education.*

Requirements for Family-Based Parish Religious Education Model

- 1) The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Catholic faith. Weekly attendance at Sunday Mass is required.
- 2) In keeping with the Archdiocesan Safe Environment policy, parents may provide family-based parish religious education only to their own children.
- 3) The parish religious education program registration form must be completed and all tuition fees paid.
- 4) The parent-catechist and the child meet at the parish at least once a month from September through May. The length of this session is a minimum of 90 minutes.
 - a. The child meets with the parish-catechist to assess the child's grasp of the content assigned for this time period. The catechist will reinforce or further develop the content as needed. The catechist who works with the child will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the program.
 - b. The parent-catechist meets with the director who will provide direction and guidance for the religious education process and prepare the parent-catechist to teach the next month's content.
 - c. It is the responsibility of the director of religious education to maintain ongoing supervision and evaluation of the parish family-based religious education process.
 - d. The schedule of these monthly meetings is provided in September by the parish director of religious education. If for a valid reason such as illness, the family cannot attend one session, arrangements must be made with the director to make up the session.
- 5) As part of this model, there are additional parish events which the family is expected to attend. The parish Director of Religious Education will provide a list of these events.
- 6) The child will be given an assessment at the parish in January and in May. These assessments are to be a comprehensive test on the learning that has taken place during the previous semester.
- 7) In order for the child to advance to the next grade level, all requirements for the religious education program must be met and a 70% correct response must be achieved on each of the learning assessments*.
- 8) As part of the year's curriculum, the parent-catechist provides ongoing instruction on the meaning of the sacraments. Immediate preparation for the sacraments is done in the parish by a parish-catechist because reception of the sacraments is an essential dimension of life in the parish community.
- 9) If a parent or child cannot meet a requirement, the parish Director of Religious Education with the Pastor's approval will try to provide an appropriate alternate plan to fulfill the requirement.

* This Requirement does not apply to children/youth with special needs.

Application to Participate in Family-Based Parish Religious Education Model

(To be submitted to the Parish Director of Religious Education)

Section One:

Name(s) of Custodial Parent(s) or Guardian

Name of person who is requesting to be the Parent-Catechist for the child/children:

Contact information of Person who will be Parent-Catechist for the child/children :

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____

Email: _____

Name and Mailing address of Parent/Guardian in whose home the child resides:

Section Two:

Name(s) of Child/Children who will Participate in this Program:

Last Name	First Name	Birth Date	Grade in school	Grade in Rel Educ.	Copy Baptism Cert submitted
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Are there other children in the family who will attend Religious Education on site in the parish?

____yes ____no

If yes, give names and grade level in Religious Education.

Section Three:

What is your reason for wanting to participate in the Family-Based Parish Religious Education Model ?

The following two "yes" lines must be checked in order for the parent to enter into this program:

Have you read the requirements of the Family-Based Parish Religious Education Model and do you agree that you and your child/children understand and will abide by these requirements? _____ Yes

In keeping with Archdiocesan Safe Environment policies, do you agree to teach only your own children? _____ Yes

Custodial Parent signature: _____

Custodial Parent name (print) _____

Parent-Catechist signature (if different from Custodial Parent) _____

Child signature: _____

Child name (print): _____

If there are more children than one who will participate, they sign and print name below.

Date: _____

Pastor's Signature: _____ Date _____

Director of Religious Education Signature: _____ Date _____

After receiving your application, the Director of Religious Education will schedule a meeting with you to discuss the possibilities for your participation in the program.

Directions for Maintaining a Safe Environment for Parish Religious Education: Grade Levels 1 through 8

September 2020 through May 2021

For the Weekly On-site Parish Religious Education Model:

The Parish Program continues to carefully implement all the directives of the Safe Environment Office established for the regular, weekly onsite Parish Religious Program.

The Parish Program abides by all the state, area and local regulations regarding the Corona-19 Virus. These regulations should govern program sessions as well as all other meetings, gatherings and activities such as program registration, parent meetings, First Communion and Confirmation celebrations.

For Family-Based Parish Religious Education Model:

It is essential that all Parish Religious Education for children and youth (grade levels 1 through 8) be done through planning and communication with the parents not directly with the children/youth.

In using an online classroom setting such as **Zoom** or the **Google Meet** option in Google Classroom, just as in an onsite Religious Education setting, a Director, Coordinator or Catechist who is on the parish Safe Environment roster must always be the host. A co-host and/or guest presenter may also participate.

In these live sessions, the parent /guardian must always be present with the child .

Directives for Safe Use of Zoom for Parish Religious Education: Grade Levels 1 through 8 (Used with permission of the Office for Catholic Schools, Archdiocese of New York)

In those cases in which a segment of Parish Religious Education is given to a group of children/ youth in a web-based classroom setting, the Safe Environment Zoom Directives established by the Office of Catholic Schools, Archdiocese of New York, should be followed. These directives as adapted to Religious Education are as follows.

An unwanted intruder is potentially dangerous, so it is critical that Directors, Coordinators and Catechists follow the recommended protocols to minimize the possibilities for outside interference.

Many of the security breaches in using Zoom have been the result of students sharing call access information on the internet and social media, not from Zoom's software being "hacked" or compromised. Relatively few "break ins" have been the result of a sophisticated hacker disabling security mechanisms, although this is always a possibility with any internet platform. Most of the news-worthy issues with Zoom have been the result of hosts failing to secure the entry points to their Zoom sessions.

In using Zoom, Directors, Coordinators and Catechists providing Religious Education should follow these security guidelines:

1. Zoom's "Waiting Room" feature is the most important security feature the platform offers and must be activated. In fact, we recommend Zoom for student-facing live video because of its ability to regulate participants through use of a **Waiting Room**.
2. Require children/youth to enter a waiting room with a standardized display name (i.e. first Name and last name) to quickly identify unwanted participants requesting access. The adult hosts of the Zoom session should know the first and last names of all the invited participants.
3. Eliminate the option for children/youth to participate in the session by phone only. If this creates an issue of inaccessibility for some children, encourage the parents to provide access to Zoom video conferencing through the technological capabilities and willingness to share, of another trusted adult (friend, relative, parent in the religious education program)
4. Work directly with the parents to ensure that there is no sharing of call information by children/youth on social media. This has been the leading cause of Zoom sessions being interrupted. This is a serious security issue and any breach of it would necessitate discontinuing Zoom sessions.
5. Use the **Critical Zoom Safe Environment Settings** every time Zoom is used for a Parish Religious Education session or meeting. These settings are summarized below and the screen shots are attached.

Critical Zoom Safe Environment Settings: Settings are to be found at Zoom.us after log in

+Computer Audio Only: Prevents unknown participants from joining via telephone
select Computer Audio and click on save

+Join Before Host Disabled: Prevents students from spending time in your "classroom" unattended. You become the first person in the call and regulate who enters with your permission.
Turn off Join before host

+Chat Enabled But Prevent Participants from Saving Chat: Allows all communication to be publicly visible and prevents students from obtaining a mutable "transcript" of the chat on their own device.
Turn on Chat
 Then click on button for Prevent participants from saving chat

+Private Chat Disabled: Prevents students from messaging each other without teacher visibility.
Turn off Private Chat

+Play Sound When Participants Join or Leave Enabled (Host Only): Provides the host a small cue that someone has entered. This is particularly useful in preventing intruders if you are notified of someone joining the session at an unorthodox time, or if your whole class is already in the session.
Turn on Play sound when participants join or leave
 Then click on button for Heard by host only

+Allow Host to Put Attendee on Hold Enabled: Provides a crucial security measure should you need to remove a participant and put them back in the “Waiting Room”

Turn on Allow host to put attendee on hold

+Screen Sharing Enabled (Host Only): Prevents students or unwanted participants from drawing text or symbols for all participants to see, or from showing inappropriate content. The host of the call retains sole control of screen sharing.

Turn on Screen sharing.

Then click on button that says Host Only

+Disable Desktop/Screen Share for Users On: Allows added security for screen sharing.

Turn on Disable Desktop/screen share for users

+Annotation Off: Prevents participants from marking up the shared screen. Note that this feature might be scaffolded in as the teacher and students gain comfort and trust on the platform

Turn off Annotation

+Whiteboard On: Allows teacher to present drawings for students to see, but not to add to.

Turn on Whiteboard

then click on button for Auto save whiteboard content when sharing is stopped.

+ Nonverbal Feedback On: Allows important engagement features for students to indicate whether they are following along by answering yes or no, raising their hand, or giving a thumbs up.

Turn on Nonverbal Feedback

+Allow Removed Participants to Rejoin Off: As a maximum security feature, once a participant has been removed from the meeting, they cannot rejoin. Teachers should communicate explicitly to students in violation of any Safe Environment policies that they cannot rejoin if they are removed.

Turn off Allow removed participants to rejoin

+Virtual Background On: Allows students to use a safe image for their background if desired.

Turn on Virtual Background

+Waiting Room On: No security feature is more important than enabling the Waiting Room as it allows the host of the session to regulate who can enter the session. Most of the instances of “Zoom Bombing” have been the result of the Waiting Room being turned off and the teacher not maintaining control of who enters their classroom.

Turn on Waiting Room



Critical Zoom Safe Environment Settings

This document reinforces our original guidelines found in PDF format [here](#).

Computer Audio Only: Prevents unknown participants from joining via telephone

Other instructions you provide for using non-Zoom audio.

Telephone and Computer Audio

Telephone

Computer Audio

Join Before Host Disabled: Prevents students from spending time in your “classroom” unattended. You become the first person in the call and regulate who enters with your permission.

Join before host

Allow participants to join the meeting before the host arrives

Chat Enabled, But Prevent Participants from Saving Chat: Allows all communication to be publicly visible and prevents students from obtaining a mutable “transcript” of the chat on their own device.

Chat

Allow meeting participants to send a message visible to all participants

Prevent participants from saving chat

Private Chat Disabled: Prevents students from messaging each other without teacher visibility.

Private chat

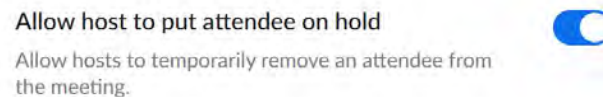
Allow meeting participants to send a private 1:1 message to another participant.



Play Sound When Participants Join or Leave Enabled (Host Only): Provides the host a small cue that someone has entered. This is particularly useful in preventing intruders if you are notified of someone joining the call at an unorthodox time, or if your whole class is already in the call.



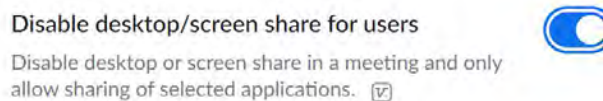
Allow Host to Put Attendee on Hold Enabled: Provides a crucial security measure should you need to remove a participant and put them back in the “Waiting Room.”



Screen Sharing Enabled (Host Only): Prevents students or unwanted participants from drawing text or symbols for all participants to see, or from showing inappropriate content. The host of the call retains sole control of screen sharing.

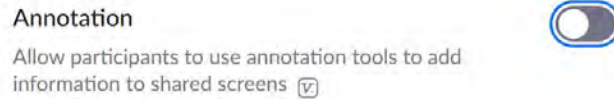


Disable Desktop/Screen Share for Users On: Allows added security for screen sharing.

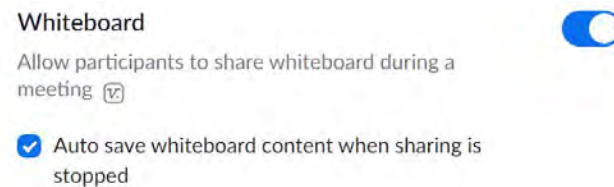




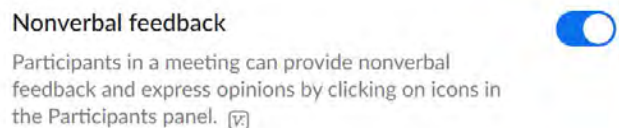
Annotation Off: Prevents participants from marking up the shared screen. Note that this feature might be scaffolded in as the teacher and students gain comfort and trust on the platform.



Whiteboard On: Allows the teacher to present drawings for students to see, but not to add to



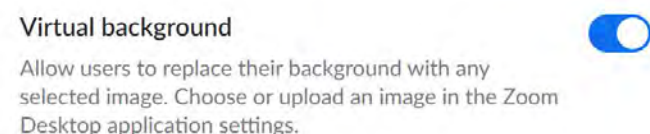
Nonverbal Feedback On: Allows important engagement features for students to indicate whether they are following along by answering yes or no, raising their hand, or giving a thumbs up.



Allow Removed Participants to Rejoin Off: As a maximum security feature, once a participant has been removed from the meeting, they cannot rejoin. Teachers should communicate explicitly to students in violation of any Safe Environment policies that they cannot rejoin if they are removed.



Virtual Background On: Allows students to use a safe image for their background if desired.





Waiting Room On: No security feature is more important than enabling the Waiting Room, as it allows the host of the call to regulate who can enter the call. Most of the instances of “Zoom Bombing” have been the results of the Waiting Room being turned off, and the teacher not maintaining control of who enters their classroom.

Waiting room



Attendees cannot join a meeting until a host admits them individually from the waiting room. If Waiting room is enabled, the option for attendees to join the meeting before the host arrives is automatically disabled. 