



Archdiocese of Newark Catechetical Office

March 6, 2020

Dear Parish Catechetical Leaders,

I am sure you are all aware of the serious and growing concerns regarding the novel Corona virus, COVID-19 and the impact that it is having world-wide leading in many cases to the disruption of lives and normal processes in society. Among the many areas of concern are, of course, children and school situations and the gathering of large groups of people and how this might impact the spread of the virus. Therefore, those in positions of responsibility are being forced to consider their particular situations and what steps should be taken in order to mitigate the potential spread of contagion. Planning and crisis management may become even more crucial especially if matters become more serious and require more drastic measures such as the suspension of on-site programming and quarantine. Of course, we hope for the best, that we would be spared the worst situation, but we must prepare for it. Accordingly, I am sending you four attachments for your consideration published by the Centers for Disease Control of the Federal Government (CDC).

Following are some things you should consider as you prepare:

Cleanliness and Disinfection of Facilities

As parish catechetical leaders, you are also called upon to consider, in consultation with your pastor and parish staff colleagues, how you can effectively plan to meet this potential threat and lessen, to the extent possible, the impact of it through the promotion of proper hygienic procedures. I want to also encourage you to assess your situation and plan to meet with your appropriate colleagues, your pastor, the Catholic School principal, if your program uses space in a Catholic school building, or with other responsible persons if there are entities which rent the school building on your property which your program shares. You should be discussing the proper procedures for regular disinfection and sanitization of classroom and other spaces used, who is responsible and how this is accomplished. **If you are using facilities that are leased by another entity, we ask that you communicate these plans to the Catechetical Office.**

General Crisis Planning

If you have not already done so, you should assemble a crisis team of advisors to work with you in drafting a crisis management plan to deal with this problem as well as any other serious situation which may have impact upon your parish programs. A form and accompanying documents for that purpose are attached. Seeking the assistance of professionals who may be parishioners or those from the surrounding community is advised. Creating a good working relationship with police, fire, and emergency squad personnel should be part of your planning and inviting parishioners who may serve the community in these capacities to be a part of your crisis management team could be extremely helpful to you. Also, reaching out to the local Catholic school principal, especially if you share the same building, can be very helpful. If the school already has prepared a crisis plan, a copy of that plan can help you in your planning and avoid the duplication of effort. In addition, your crisis response team should include catechists, parents, and the building custodian.

Communication with Local Authorities and School Districts

With regard to this specific health situation, you should be in communication with local health and emergency management authorities as well as your local school district / Catholic school. This will ensure that you are well informed with regards to any local developments, decisions regarding school closures, and further developments.

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Attendance Policies

Sickness requiring isolation from the program may impact the children and families in your program. This may also have specific impact on those children preparing for First Holy Communion or Confirmation. In this case, flexibility in the application of attendance policies ought to be exercised. No one should be penalized for the inability to participate in any aspects of the preparation process because of illness. Keep in mind that parents also have the right to keep children home if they feel attending gatherings may place them at risk, especially in cases where there are family members who may be vulnerable or may have pre-existing health conditions.

Planning for Temporary Program Closures / Programming Suspensions

In the worst-case scenario, should it become necessary to generally suspend catechetical classes for an extended period, or if some students need to remain at home for an extended period, some means of assisting families to continue catechesis at home needs to be developed. Materials should be provided for the students to take home along with a guide or schedule for home study. Perhaps catechists can prepare at-home lessons for their classes. Publishers also often have online resources on their websites that may be used for at-home study or may be able to provide additional support. Should you need some assistance finding resources feel free to contact our office.

Communication with Parents

As part of your crisis planning you should have developed a system in place that facilitates quick and efficient communication with faith formation families should a program closure be necessary. We also encourage to proactively communicate with parents in order to advise them generally that you are aware of this situation and are taking all the proper precautions, to encourage them to keep their child home if they are sick, to ensure they are aware of the attendance policy and to assure them that you will provide the opportunity for home study should that option become necessary. Please also be mindful of the need to protect the individual privacy of health information.

Communication with the Archdiocesan Catechetical Office

Please be sure to advise the Catechetical Office should there be any particular development in your parish with regard to the Corona virus outbreak and any necessary actions you may take. As this situation develops, we will address the plans going forward at county meetings and you will receive necessary updates from the Catechetical Office. You can also consult the Archdiocesan website at: <https://www.rcan.org/archdiocese-newark-issues-guidance-priests-religious-and-parishioners-regarding-coronavirus-covid-19> . We are also planning to offer a live zoom teleconference to address any questions you may have as well as share any additional information with you. Please watch your e-mail for an announcement in this regard.

Thank you for your attention to this most serious situation.

Sincerely in Christ,



Ronald L. Pihokker, OFS, M.A.Ed.
Director