



Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

Office of the Cardinal

Memorandum

To: All priests

From: Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston

Date: August 24, 2020

Re: Guidance on Catechetical Programming

Adapting to new modes of ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging and fruitful. I am grateful for your efforts to guide and support the faithful of this local Church during these trying times.

In preparation for the 2020-2021 catechetical year, the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis has created a resource document to guide parish priests and other catechetical leaders in choosing how to structure and deliver catechesis in the parish setting.

These are the fundamental principles which should inform your decisions on parish catechesis and sacramental preparation during the pandemic:

1. Catechesis is essential, therefore every parish must have a catechetical program during the 2020-2021 catechetical year.
2. In-person gatherings with well-formed catechists are the preferred means of giving catechesis under the direction of pastors and other catechetical leaders.
3. Catechesis should engage individual persons as members of families and communities, in order to engage the whole person.
4. All in-person gatherings at parishes must be carried out with prudence and adherence to the directives of the Archbishop of Galveston-Houston and civil authorities.
5. Parishes providing in-person catechesis should also provide alternative modes of catechesis for those who, for a just reason, choose not to join in-person catechetical gatherings.
6. Parishes should maintain the relational nature of adolescent faith formation.

Apart from the Sacred Liturgy and times of prayer in our churches, in-person gatherings on parish campuses are allowed only for the faith formation of children and adolescents, Catechumens, and Candidates for initiation into the Catholic Church, as well as programs of sacramental preparation. This permission for in-person catechetical gatherings does not include adult bible studies, conferences, or special presentations.

The attached document elaborates on the fundamental principles outlined above. I encourage you and your catechetical leadership teams to follow these principles during the coming catechetical year. If you have any questions, you may contact the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis. Thank you.

DND:mgs

Guidance with Regard to Catechetical Programming in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston 2020-2021 Academic Year

1. Catechesis is essential; therefore, every parish must have a catechetical program during the 2020-2021 catechetical year.

Evangelization is the constitutive mission of the Church. As Pope St. Paul VI said so succinctly, the Church “exists in order to evangelize” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 14). Catechesis, as an essential moment in the broader task of evangelization, must not be neglected, even in the midst of a pandemic. As we move away from the immediate crisis that confronted us so unexpectedly in March to a more considered planning process for the coming academic year, it is essential that all of our parishes make plans to implement a full catechetical program adapted to the current circumstances. I encourage you to embrace this time of planning as one filled with new opportunity to spread the Good News.

2. In-person gatherings with well-formed catechists are the preferred means of giving catechesis under the direction of pastors and other catechetical leaders.

As has always been the case in the catechetical ministry, the single most important tool is not a book, video, or published resource. The single most important tool is the personal witness of a faithful catechist who is alive in his or her faith in Jesus Christ and who wants to share that living faith with others. Though our current reality has meant that we have been unable to gather for in person meetings, we are all praying for an end to this obstacle. As social beings, we are most effectively transformed through personal encounter and witness. That personal encounter is most completely realized when people are able to gather in the same physical space and converse fully with one another. Therefore, to the extent feasible, parishes should continue to regard in-person gathered sessions as the preferred and privileged means of conducting catechesis.

3. Catechesis should engage individual persons as members of families and communities, in order to engage the whole person.

Amidst the challenges and struggles of this pandemic there have also been unexpected gifts. Many of our parishioners have chosen to embrace the fact that limited mobility has meant more time spent with their families at home. This intentional focus on family life has deepened their sense of the *ecclesia domestica*. In households large and small, tied together by bonds of blood or by voluntary and intentional association, our people, though unable to come together in their parish buildings, continue to gather to give praise and worship to God, study his word, and come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the faith. This experience has reminded us of what we already knew; our catechetical programs, therefore, should rightly regard people as parts of a whole and not solely autonomous individuals. Our deepest theology teaches us that we are saved not as individuals but as part of the People of God as we are baptized into membership in the Body of Christ. Our relationship with God is always intimately

connected to our relationships with one another. Efforts made to transform and deepen people's relationship with their God must work in and through fundamental social realities and engage them in and through their families and households. This is as true in catechesis for adults as it is for catechesis of children and adolescents. Catechetical methodology should therefore privilege those means that engage people in and through and support the development of vital *ecclesiarum domesticarum*.

4. All in-person gatherings at parishes must be carried out with prudence and adherence to the directives of the Archbishop of Galveston-Houston and civil authorities.

The Church has a solemn obligation to undertake its ministries attentive to the common good of society and aware in a particular way of the needs of the most vulnerable members of society. Those gathered-in-person must take reasonable steps to minimize and limit the possibility of spreading the novel coronavirus. In particular, the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) and the Texas Education Agency ([TEA](#)) must be taken with seriousness and applied as appropriate in each of our parishes.

In most parishes, in-person catechesis takes place in spaces that are shared by a number of different ministries. In particular, in those parishes that have parochial schools it is often the case that the day-school and the catechetical program share the same parish facilities. Therefore, it is essential that pastors facilitate conversations among the various stakeholders and leaders so that effective plans can be made in coordination with one another with regard to these shared spaces. Special consideration may need to be made with regard to more frequent cleaning and disinfection of spaces. Where this is not possible, serious consideration will need to be made about whether the spaces can in fact be shared at the present time.

Special consideration should also be made in the planning process for catechists. In most cases catechesis is carried out with the loving and generous help of volunteer catechists. In some parishes these catechists may come disproportionately from the population of senior citizens and retirees. As you know, these populations are more vulnerable and COVID-19 has the potential to be more serious if contracted. Therefore, in the planning process special consideration needs to be given on the recruitment and training of catechists in such a way as to minimize unnecessary risks to them.

5. Parishes providing in-person catechesis should also provide alternative modes of catechesis for those who, for a just reason, choose not to join in-person catechetical gatherings.

Because individual families face such a variety of circumstances, even within a single parish, the reality is that participation in in-person catechesis, even when conducted under the safest and most ideal circumstances, may not be suitable for some persons or families.

The following list is in no way exhaustive but does suggest some of the possible circumstances that would warrant a prudential forgoing of participation in in-person catechesis.

- ✘ An individual may be immunocompromised or have another underlying medical condition that would make possible exposure to the novel coronavirus a much greater risk than for the general population.
- ✘ Even if the individual him or herself does not have such a condition, he or she may be part of household with a person who does.
- ✘ A household may contain a person who is engaged in work essential to the public good who is thereby obligated to minimize the possibility that he or she might have to participate in a cautionary quarantine if someone in the household were exposed to someone who later was determined to carry the virus.
- ✘ A household's financial situation may be such that it would be financially devastating if a particular individual was not able to work due to contracting the novel coronavirus or be subject to a mandatory cautionary quarantine.

The above principles also apply to sacramental preparation. As an ecclesial event, sacramental preparation for Catholic School, Home-School, and parish students has always been tied to their home parish. The use of alternative models for sacramental preparation may be necessary during these difficult times, and should suffer them no undue delay in receiving the sacraments.

The catechetical offices of our Chancery have created and curated numerous resources and trainings to assist in the planning and implementation of alternative models of catechesis. These remain available, will continue to be expanded, and should be consulted by you and your parish catechetical leaders as you engage in your planning process.

6. Parishes should maintain the relational nature of adolescent faith formation. Middle School and High School catechesis is embedded in the practice of comprehensive youth ministry as articulated in the 1997 USCCB document *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (RTV). In it, the bishop's propose that adolescent catechesis "incorporates a variety of program approaches including parish and school programs; small-group programs; home-based programs, activities, and resources; one-on-one and mentoring programs; and independent or self-directed programs or activities." In addition to knowledge of the faith, adolescent catechesis "explicitly invites young people to explore the possibility of a personal call to ministry and the beauty of the total gift of self for the sake of the kingdom." (RTV) Due to the multiplicity of formats that adolescent catechesis embodies, it is important to identify safe practices for each format. Fruitful discipleship requires that we maintain the varied and relational nature of adolescent faith formation. The OACE is available to assist you in this process.