



Always Connected

A FRAMEWORK FOR FAITH FORMATION IN FALL 2020

"The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds.

Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.

...And you have to start from the ground up."

— *Pope Francis (Evangelii Gaudium)*



THE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Encounter • Formation • Discipleship

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 3

Step One - Reflect as a Parish Team 5

A Chance for Creativity 8

Step Two - Create a Plan 11

Even More Things to Consider 14

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT OUR THEME

Young people are connected to families. Families are connected to other families. By Baptism, we are all connected to the Body of Christ. All of us are connected through the Eucharist.

To form disciples, we need to start with other disciples. It is our prayer that families see the parish as an extension of their own families. If not, we have work to do. Everything in this plan and in the suggested models is rooted in the general principle that we are always connected to one another – through our families, through our parishes, and through our communities. Anything that creates a disconnect must be discarded. This is our chance to make the Domestic Church come alive.

Parish leaders are encouraged to create teams for formation so that the work does not fall to the D/CRE or pastor alone. Invite clergy, formation leaders, catechist, and parents to be a part of the team. Think beyond the pandemic. This moment in time allows us to create for success and then consider how we can function in light of Covid-19. Do not let the pandemic drive your planning. Plan first for successful formation of disciples. Then adapt as you go.

Many have been saying for years that the traditional classroom does not always work effectively for everyone when it comes to passing on the faith. Use this opportunity to connect your young people and their families with the parish in creative, productive ways.

DO WE HAVE TO CHANGE?

Faith formation is more than passing on the faith, it is helping young people and their families fall in love with the person of Jesus Christ.

Evangelization happens first. Catechesis follows. As you plan for the fall, ask yourself to honestly consider whether what you have been doing for years is really working. Are you making disciples, or just getting the 30 sessions done? Are the families engaged or just dropping off the kids?

It is easy to get stuck. Let's take advantage of the opportunity this moment in our lives and in our Church offers. Let us commit to thinking all about how we can connect families to our parish, young people to the "first witnesses" of the faith in their homes, and all of us to the person of Jesus Christ.

Remember, no one ever said believing led to belonging. Let's work on connecting our folks to one another and to Jesus, so belonging can strengthen believing!

A NEW VISION

Parents are burdened by the demands of adjusting their work and home lives to an ever-changing set of public safety guidelines and requirements. Children miss seeing their classmates and teachers in person and are probably as fatigued by video conferencing as the rest of us. We don't know when things will return to normal or what a "new normal" might look like. We know that we can only plan for an extended period of uncertainty.

We also know that we are tasked with catechesis, with passing on faith in the mystery of the Triune God's plan of salvation for us and our response to the revelation of this plan (see General Catechetical Directory #47). We know, according to St. John Paul II, that catechesis is a moment in the whole process of evangelization (see *Catechesi Tradendae* #18). We know the essential role the family plays in both evangelization and catechesis, in passing on the faith (see the Catechism of the Catholic Church #s 2221-2231).

This present moment in our lifetimes can be viewed as a unique opportunity for the evangelization of the family. In this present moment, we can work together to build up the family, the domestic church. Let's accompany families in our parishes by walking with them and encouraging them in their journeys of faith, so that they know through us what the Lord meant when he said "My yoke is easy, and my burden light" (Mt 11:30).

Let us work together to form a new vision for faith formation that builds upon where we have been and moves us to where we ought to be.

STEP ONE - REFLECT AS A PARISH TEAM

This team should include the pastor, the D/CRE, the catechists, and anyone who shares the responsibility of passing on the faith to those in faith formation. The task of planning for the future should never be the responsibility of only one person. Spend a week or two putting together a team to plan for the fall. No one is going anywhere right now. Registration can wait. Don't do it quickly. Do it well.

GETTING STARTED

1. Consider your mission first. Absent the pandemic and all that it brings to bear, what is our goal when catechizing young people and their families?
2. The coming year has many unknowns. Be flexible in your ministry so we can adapt quickly when/if change is necessary.
3. Do not start from scratch. Yes, things are different, but your ministry had things in place before the pandemic. Use your successes as a starting point.
4. If your ministry's mission, goals, and objectives are not already clearly stated, be sure to clarify and document them. Having this clarity and clearly defining the needs your ministry is responding to will help you make good decisions - both during your regular and contingency planning.
5. Set a go/no go deadline for decisions.

MAJOR QUESTIONS FOR PARISH TEAMS

- » What is the mission of your ministry?
- » What are the needs of our community?
- » How can we creatively meet those needs?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR PARISH TEAMS

1. Is the mission of faith formation to form disciples or to deliver content? Perhaps it is a bit of both, but without the initial relationship, the content can fall on deaf ears. How can we build a relationship with our young people?
2. Many young people still feel isolated, disconnected, and long to know that they are loved. How can our parish community respond creatively to these needs?
3. In light of what is needed, what are our current goals?
 - » With families?
 - » With young people?
 - » With catechists?

GOAL SETTING FOR PARISH TEAMS

1. What are specific objectives that will help us accomplish our goals? (i.e., each teen starting the Confirmation formation will have two adults from the parish community (non-relatives) who know them by name at the end of the year).
2. What are the parameters in which we must work?
 - » Within a safe environment
 - » Following CDC and local guidelines
3. What strategies will we use to achieve our objectives?
(*Examples*)
 - » Recruit adults who are not part of the Confirmation team to serve as parish mentors, including former catechists who have retired (think: older catechists who no longer feel comfortable in a classroom)
 - » Send postcards to every young person from the parish staff with the promise to pray for them on a specific day
 - » Inviting parents to attend any face-to-face formation with their children to help parents understand their important role

TIPS FOR PLANNING FOR PARISH TEAMS

1. Be willing to let go of that which has not worked in the past.
2. Do not let anyone block your creativity. Commit to not blocking the creativity of others on your team.
3. Avoid terms like "virtual" or "online only." People respond more to words like "remote."
4. See everything through the lenses of discipleship. If what you propose appears as though families will merely jump through hoops just to get it done, go back to the drawing board. Make sure what you ask of your families is filled with the possibility of moving them spiritually closer to Christ. Trust God on this, be comfortable with not being able to collect evidence.

CONSIDER WORKING BACKWARDS

1. List all events, programs, initiatives, and strategies that you have been using in your ministry. It might be helpful to note whether each one is:
 - » Gathered physically
 - » Gathered digitally
 - » Blended digital and non-digital
 - » Non-gathered, non-digital
 - » Non-gathered digital
2. For each of the items on your list, answer the following questions (there might be more than one response for each question):
 - » What need has this been responding to?
 - » What objectives or goals has this been intended to achieve?
 - » How have we been measuring success or effectiveness?
3. Make a new list naming all the needs, goals, and objectives you identified
 - » Is there anything that is no longer needed?
 - » Is anything missing? What are the needs now (that may or may not have existed before)?
 - » What are our priorities at this time?

A CHANCE FOR CREATIVITY

Change is always difficult but this fall it may be inevitable. You can seize this opportunity, when change is expected, to think creatively and/or perhaps finally make real the dreams you have held onto in order to breathe new life into your ministry. We strongly recommend you delay the opening of faith formation at your parish until early October to give families a chance to adjust to their return to school, parishes a chance to wrap up First Holy Communion celebrations, and everyone to catch their collective breath.

CREATIVE IDEAS

- » Host a parent formation session before you begin to give mom and dad a heads up about how this year's formation will happen.
- » How can we help families feel included if we cannot gather?
- » How could we use video in the delivery of catechesis?
- » Could gamification be an option when gathering classes remotely?
- » Use Zoom or GoogleMeet to schedule regular check-ins with catechists. See how they are faring and what resources they might need.
- » Get all those First Holy Communions in this summer by scheduling them during daily Mass. One child with parents per Mass. What a great way to include daily communicants in these celebrations!
- » Challenge families to share how they are living their faith at home by posting to your social media accounts with a specific hashtag. Highlight those posts on your parish website.
- » Think outside of the classroom. Encourage your families to realize faith is integral to life and not just another subject their child learns from someone else. Seize this opportunity to have parents take up their primary roles as purveyors of the faith.
- » Think about assigning catechists to families instead of classes. What happens if catechists meet on a regular basis with families to share faith, break open Scripture, etc.?
- » Host a game night once in a while to challenge your families on how much they have learned.
- » Because they are easier to measure we all tend to focus on "right answers given." And while facts and content are important we must remember our primary purpose is to build relationships between young people, their families and Jesus. What use is it if I can win a medal on the facts of scripture if in my heart they have no meaning and in my life they bear no weight?

- » Could you send letters to your families? Yes, letters! Not a form letter, but a good old fashion hand-written letter. Could you partner seniors with young people to write back and forth?
- » List ways families can serve together? Could families arrive early and help set up Mass? Could they help with the supplies or disinfecting?
- » Remember that only disciples make disciples. Share your own faith story.
- » Spend time with families, not just the parents, not just the young people.
- » Host a Prep Rally for families preparing to celebrate important Sacraments. This can be done in person with social distancing or even remotely. Partner with a starving Catholic artist whose events are all cancelled to lead the event.
- » Help parents manage their role as first witnesses of the faith. Give them creative ways to share their faith stories with their young people.
- » Invite children and parents to walk a decade of the Rosary outside
- » Post a question of the week on your parish website and offer small prizes (or the bragging rights) to the winning family each week.
- » Flip the classroom. Offer the topic and give older students the chance to research and teach others.
- » Have last year's teachers teach the first class to say goodbye and remotely "move up" the students.

Have one to add? Send to it us [via email](#).

CLERGY-SPECIFIC IDEAS

- » Set up your phone and film yourself getting vested for Mass. Explain the vestments and the significance of each.
- » Highlight how you pray each morning and evening and challenge families to pray together at least once per day.
- » Give a tour of the Church on your phone, explaining as you go.
- » Give some tips for making a good confession.

- » End each homily with a challenge for families. Then challenge the catechists to use that challenge question as a discussion starter the next time young people meet. This is much friendlier way to ensure Mass attendance than having young people get "Mass cards" signed.
- » Host a Q&A for families.

PLAN FOR THE UNKNOWN

- » What if I have catechists who do not feel comfortable returning?
- » What if a student (or teacher) contracts Covid-19 after a face-to-face gathering?
- » What is your capacity with social distancing?
- » How will you plan for accountability? While our focus is on strengthening the domestic church, it is important to make sure any assigned work is completed.
- » Will you provide catechists with masks? What about students?
- » Be sure to provide an orientation for Zoom (or similar platform) for your catechists. The Leadership Institute can help.
- » What do we do with young children (Pre-K), who can no longer gather in person? Is sending home resources to parents enough? (spoiler alert: it never was)
- » Have we ordered supplies for cleaning (via the diocese)?

OTHER RESOURCES/LINK

- » CatholicBrain.com
- » Strawpoll.com
- » WheelofNames.com
- » TheFaceofPrayer.com
- » [The Family Bible Challenge](https://TheFamilyBibleChallenge.com)
- » [The Catequizem](https://TheCatequizem.com)
- » Kidsbulletin.com

Remember, the publisher of your texts probably as a great website, a parent portal, and a plethora of resources available as part of your package price.

STEP TWO - CREATE A PLAN

Every parish is asked to create a plan based on one of these three scenarios. You will not need to send in your plans to the diocese. This guide is simply to challenge you to think creatively and beyond the status quo. Plans can take shape in one of three ways:

- » On Campus
- » Half @ Home
- » Hybrid

Please note: Going completely remote is not an option as it creates a disconnect among young people, their families, and the parish. **We strongly encourage you to consider hybrid on-line/in-person, parish/home programming that works toward the goal of equipping and supporting parents as the primary educators of their children in the faith (see Lumen Gentium #11). We believe it is possible to offer content that helps build engagement among families in the life of faith at home and that this goal should be foremost among the goals of our children's faith formation programming.** Every parish is also asked to consider delaying the start of faith formation in fall 2020 to the first week of October. Use September for:

- » Letting families get used to the "new normal" in Catholic/public schools
- » Catch up on First Holy Communion celebrations (unless you are able to do this utilizing Sunday and daily Mass in the summer)
- » Sending a personal postcard to all families welcoming them back to a new and exciting year of faith formation

POSSIBLE MODELS TO CONSIDER

HALF AND HALF

Host one half of the students, together with one or both parents, in your largest meeting space. Commit to one public meeting per month and meet by grade level or by alphabet (A-L one week, M-Z another week, which keeps families together).

Use your best catechist or clergy as a master teacher to coordinate each session. Focus the lesson on the Gospel or the overview of the next few chapters' lessons. Ask parents to keep all printed work at home. End the lesson by giving specific assignments and then follow up with an email of dates when you will meet remotely.

Between the times you gather, use Zoom or another tool to host smaller breakout sessions where moms and dads are invited to join with their children to report back on what they discussed and how they completed the work together. Use Father's challenge question of the week to facilitate discussion.

Repeat with each group until you work your way through all participants. To help children keep track of learning, you could even invite students to take a photo (with their own device or mom and dad's) and send the photo of the worksheet/assignment back to you via email.

DOMESTIC CHURCH

Evangelize your parish by catechizing the family! Family catechesis has proven to be a powerful experience for thousands of families within the diocese and across the nation. Children and teens need to become lifelong Catholics and members of the church which starts by involving the whole family in the life of the church.

What is family Catechesis?

"Family-centered catechetical programs are opportunities for parents to catechize their children directly, for spouses to catechize each other and for children to catechize one another and their parents" (National Directory for Catechesis #61.2)

What are some goals of family catechesis?

- » help families learn how to pray and to discuss their faith together
- » help parents better understand their role as primary catechists
- » bring families together in order to share and deepen their Catholic faith
- » strengthen the relationship between the family and the Church
- » establish ongoing Catholic faith practices within the family life
- » integrate the family into the parish community

Models of family catechesis:

- » Intergenerational whole community family catechesis
- » Multi-media family catechesis
- » Family prayer celebration
- » Activity-centers family catechesis
- » Family Christian service projects
- » Family holiday celebration
- » Family pilgrimage
- » Family retreat day

Families are sheltered in place together. Focus our ministry on families rather than age-specific groupings. This is an opportunity to help them grow in faith together and to equip them with tools to intentionally integrate faith into the daily life of their households. We say that parents are the primary catechists; this is a time when we can really support them in that role. Consider gathering families together on a rotating basis.

CLASSROOM MODIFIED

Some parishes may simply be unable to change the way formation has always happened. This “new normal,” however, will require some modifications. If you plan to maintain a traditional classroom model, consider the following:

- » What is your capacity with social distancing?
- » What if a student (or teacher) contracts Covid-19 after a face-to-face gathering?
- » Will you provide catechists with masks? What about students?
- » Will textbooks stay at the location or go back and forth?
- » How many more catechists will you need, given the social distancing requirements?
- » How will you accommodate families that are not comfortable returning?

Sacramental Specific Ideas

- » Confirmation remote retreat
- » Formation for parents via Zoom (or similar platform)
- » Sponsors' Meetings via Zoom (or similar platform)
- » Creative saints projects via Wevideo or Kahoot
- » Service the whole family can enjoy

OTHER THOUGHTS ON MODELS

Use the model that offers the greatest degree of flexibility. Consider a small group model too. A small group can meet effectively either in person or digitally. Small groups do not all need to meet at the same time, and do not need to have the same focus (e.g. one could be a Bible study, another could be faith-sharing modeled after the examen, another could be a more systematic catechesis). If larger, in-person gatherings are available, small group breakouts can occur during the larger gatherings.

Though it may be counterintuitive, place less focus on conveying Church teaching, and more focus on the lived behaviors of discipleship. Help students and parents learn how to pray personally. Support them in reading Scripture by themselves. Draw upon the works of mercy as a way to practically live out their faith in everyday life. If we help people “flex” these “muscles” and faith becomes more integrated into how they live, helping them later learn more about Church teaching will be more fruitful since they will have a more practical, lived connection to it.

EVEN MORE THINGS TO CONSIDER

Now that you have spent some serious time planning, let us offer some additional considerations. We know this is all pretty overwhelming. Life has changed. Things are different. People everywhere are wearing masks. Grandparents haven't hugged their grandchildren in months. Play dates have been cancelled and family milestones like birthdays and graduation suddenly look much different. Now, imagine you are a child dealing with all of this. Perspective helps.

ENHANCED HEALTH MEASURES

This is priority #1 for a clear reason: we need to ensure that we are well-equipped to manage the enhanced health requirements that are necessary to protect against COVID-19 infection. This includes PPE and other equipment, supplies, social distancing protocols, and monitoring of health indicators required to protect our children, teachers, and staff. While we all continue to assess guidance to determine the specific protocols that will be implemented, we must also continue to work with our local Health Department on what those look like. Stay connected locally.

BE AWARE OF TRAUMA

The start of the 2020-2021 school year will be unlike any other that we've experienced. We know students and staff alike are experiencing a lack of closure from physically being out of school buildings since March of the current school year. We know that we must have a thoughtful process to reacclimate children, parents, and staff to being back together. This means we must focus on the social-emotional needs of our communities while implementing trauma-informed approaches to teaching and learning.

CONSIDER PHASED OPENINGS

Traditionally, all catechists and students begin their respective school years at the same time. We are seeing so far that other countries are modifying schedules, and/or starting groups of students in person at different times. Consider this option for your parish as well. Since many families have multiple children, considering grouping families return to larger gathered sessions alphabetically instead of by grade. Mom and dad will be grateful.

SERVE THE FAMILY

Our parish faith formation offerings have always existed to serve this end – to evangelize and catechize the family and offer everyone support to grow in faith and holiness. Yet the methods and strategies of the last few months and years were not designed to account for these times. We have an opportunity to embrace more fully Pope St. John Paul II's call for a New Evangelization – new in ardor, methods, and expressions (Address to CELAM, 9 March 1983) specifically in the context of the norms of parish life and elements of our formation programs.

Our goal is “to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today, who are buoyed up by hope but at the same time ... oppressed by fear and distress” (Pope St. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #1). We can show families how “the joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #1).

This means we may need to think very differently “so that the church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #27).

If, as Pope Benedict wrote, “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and decisive direction” (*Deus Caritas Est* #1), then let us now consider new ways in which we can embrace what Pope St. John Paul II called our “supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples” (*Redemptoris Missio* #3).

REMEMBER: ALWAYS CONNECTED

1. Focus on how families live their faith. Always ask: how can we strengthen the domestic church?
2. Connect. Connect.
 - » Parents to the parish
 - » Young people to the parish
 - » Young people to their families
 - » Parents to their children
 - » Families to the parish
 - » Families to each other
 - » Parish to the wider community
 - » Everyone to Christ