

Office of Catechesis Newsletter - January 21, 2021

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Message from Gary

Planning First Communion Preparation and Celebrations

As parishes begin their First Communion preparation, we have received questions about Retreat Days and planning First Communion Masses. Here are some thoughts about planning. Of

course, be sure to follow the guidelines of the current Catholic Comeback Matrix. Conditions can change. The matrix guidelines take precedence over any suggestions here.

First Communion Retreats

A retreat is permitted, but safety is essential. Take the usual precautions of social distancing and wearing masks, and avoid having children handle the same materials or craft supplies. Since parents and kids participate together, social distancing should be arranged by household. If the number of first communicants is large, or space is limited, or precautions make it too complicated, consider alternatives.

Think *safer, simpler and shorter*. Remember there is no requirement to hold a retreat day. In some cases, it may be better to hold smaller gatherings for shorter periods. Perhaps virtual sessions or at-home activities can be used effectively too. Flexibility is key.

First Communion Mass

First Communion may be celebrated at regular Sunday Masses. Due to larger numbers, some parishes will celebrate First Communions over two or more weekends. Some parishes plan an additional Mass. There is nothing liturgically distinctive about a First Communion Mass, except that children will be receiving Holy Communion for the first time. So, a parish usually has several options to safely celebrate First Communion.

Mass should be planned with the normal precautions in mind: distances between pews, wearing masks, social distancing between households, receiving communion in the hand only, disposable orders of worship, no physical sign of peace outside of the family, and so on. We will probably not be receiving Holy Communion from the Cup soon. So you may teach about receiving under both kinds, but plan for just receiving the host.

Some familiar practices would not be permitted during the pandemic – processions, gathering in a close group for photos, children bringing up the gifts, and so on. This is a time to focus on what is essential – receiving Jesus in Holy Communion.

Participating in Mass prior to First Communion

One of the challenges during this time is that many families have not been attending Sunday Mass since the beginning of the pandemic. Some may be fearful. Others have simply gotten out of the habit of getting their family ready and taking them to church. Whatever the reason, for a second grader, that is a long time to have been away from Mass. Perhaps they have watched Mass on a computer or TV. But there is nothing to really replace the formative power of participating in Mass.

Some parishes are actively inviting and encouraging parents to return to Mass with their children. This may involve coaching parents on taking steps to return; it may mean explaining the safety precautions.

Dennis Vlasak (DRE at St. Kilian, Hartford) asks first communicants to complete Mass Reports in which they answer simple questions about the Mass they attend. This practice has helped families return to Mass and begin to develop again the habit of weekly attendance.

What are you doing to encourage First Communion families (or any families) to begin participating in Mass again? Let us know

Office of Catechesis News

Co-Workers in Transitions

Continuing our updates on new directors of religious education or faith formation, we welcome:

- Jessica Lemoine, Coordinator of Child and Youth Ministries, Divine Mercy
- Christopher Grote, Director of Faith Formation, St. Jerome

For all those beginning a new role this year, let us pray, and let us pledge our support and companionship along the way.

If you know of someone new to a position that we have not listed, please let us know.

Policy Updates

Each year, the Parish and School Policy Manual is reviewed and updated if needed. Several changes were made this past summer. You can view a [List of Policy Manual Updates](#). The current manual and related resources can be downloaded from our [Parish and School Policy Manual and Frequently Used Forms webpage](#).

This month, we want to highlight Record Retention. (Last month we addressed High Risk Activities during field trips.)

Record Retention

Catechetical leaders sometimes wonder how long they need to keep old permission slips, class lists, newsletters and other records. We now have updated [Parish Records Retention Guidelines](#). This document provides guidance on how long to retain all sorts of records, whether paper or electronic. There is a section for Catechetical Records, which addresses records related to religious education programs, youth ministry activities, sacramental preparation, and so on. You may need to look at other sections for financial, administrative, or historical records. Each

“retention schedule” indicates how long to retain various types of record, and, if a record is not permanent, whether to discard or destroy (that is, whether you may recycle or should shred). If you would like further information about handling parish records, contact the [Office for Archives and Records Management](#).

Upcoming Events

Family Focus (A Virtual Sharing Session): A Conversation for Catechetical Leaders about Families, COVID & Beyond

February 2nd - 1:00- 2:00pm

February 3rd -10:00- 11:00am

February 9th - 9:00- 10:00am

Faith Formation leaders have been having unique experiences in ministry over the last several months. Choose one of these times to join a conversation with your colleagues. These sessions will be an opportunity for small group sharing about your experiences with families during this pandemic and your relationship with them. What have you learned during this time and how does it inform your ministry with families going forward?

We hope these sessions will be an opportunity to share your experience, and also, prepare you to have similar meaningful conversations with your families.

Registration for each session will be limited to 12 participants.

[Register to Attend](#)

Family Perspectives: A Presentation on Family Catechesis - COVID and Beyond

March 10, 2021- 9:00-10:30am

Presented By: Gary Pokorny and Dr. Kathie Amidei

Families have had unique circumstances over the past several months including varied experiences in catechetical and educational settings that may have affected them emotionally and spiritually. We may have had less physical contact or face to face meetings, and we have had to find new ways to communicate with them. We may have increased connecting though Zoom, email, and texts. This may have offered new ways to relate to families or we may feel less

connected to parents and families. What are the ramifications and implications of this time of alternate interaction with our families?

This session will summarize some of what the past year has meant to catechesis, consider some strategies to transition to a “new catechetical normal” and thrive in catechetical ministry going forward.

Register to Attend

Archdiocese News

The Gift of Sunday

On January 25, parish leaders will receive a reflection entitled, The Gift of Sunday, that lays the theological foundation for an archdiocesan "Sunday Mass Initiative." It will be accompanied by a Study Guide for parish leaders to personally study and to discuss the document.

This document for leaders will be followed by events and resources for all your parishioners - Lenten Prayer Cards, regional Lenten Missions around the archdiocese, and an Easter booklet.

Watch your email for details, or visit the [Gift of Sunday webpage](#).

The Sunday Mass Initiative will continue long beyond this Lent-Easter season. In the future as the initiative unfolds, we will point you to catechetical resources to use with children and families.

From our Friends



Upcoming Mareda Events

- **January 28** at 1:00 pm- "Let's Play" Join your colleagues in some online game playing. Have fun AND pick up some ideas!

- **February 24** at 10:00 am- Bishop Schuerman will join Mareda to share his personal Lenten practices and talk about hope.

Visit [Mareda Webpage](#) for more information and to register for upcoming events

Catechist Enrichment Night: The Heart of Catechesis, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

Tuesday February 2, 2021

6:00pm - 8:00pm

Join with catechists throughout the Archdiocese as we spend an evening together sharing, learning and supporting each other in our call to spread the Good News of our faith. Dr. Mike Brummond, assistant professor & Director of the MA program at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology will be speaking about various parts of the Holy Mass including...

- An exploration of the signs, symbols, and gestures we use in the Mass
- A look at how our worship joins the saints and angels in Heaven
- A discussion of how the laity participative in offering the Eucharist

Come! Discover how the Holy Mass is the essence of what we do as Catechists!

COST: \$5.00 Catechists from Waukesha Deaneries / \$10.00 Catechists from other Deaneries

LOCATION: In Person at St. Mary Parish in Menomonee Falls or Virtually over Zoom.

Reservation Required! [Register Now](#)

Resources

Offer this Essay Contest to your Students Grades 3-8!

Here is a national contest for kids in your faith formation program. The Communication Center is inviting all children in grades 3 through 8 who are enrolled in a Catholic school or in a parish religious education program to participate in Christ Is Alive! National Essay Contest. Share it with your students and their families. Two winners in each grade from across the United States will be selected.

“Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!
He is in you, he is with you and he never abandons you.”

– Pope Francis, Christus Vivit

Visit the [Christ Is Alive webpage](#) for details and everything you need to promote.

Cyber Threats to Remote Learning

During the pandemic, many schools and religious education programs switched to using online instruction. Even when parishes, schools and instructors take precautions, there are people out there who seek to disrupt or take advantage of the situation. Our Safe Environment Office offers two resources to alert parents, caregivers, and educators of the particular risks of online learning:

- For Parents and Caregivers - [Public Service Announcement by the FBI](#)
- For Educators - [Cyber Threats to K-12 Remote Learning](#)

Please feel free to share with parents, catechists and others.

Resources to Prepare for Lent

Ash Wednesday

You may have heard that the [distribution of ashes will be different this year](#). The directive from the Vatican explains, “The priest takes the ashes and sprinkles them on the head of each one without saying anything.” Parishes will provide some catechesis before the distribution. But even afterward, you may find yourself in conversations about what people have experienced. It is good to be prepared yourself, and to help prepare catechists and others who can help your parishioners understand how and why this familiar practice has been modified. Here is the [Archdiocesan information](#) and a [recent news article](#).

LENT Webpage

Our [Lent webpage](#) offers links to catechetical resources to help you observe and teach the season. Resources include classroom and home activities, brief videos, Lenten practices, catechesis on the sacrament of Reconciliation, Stations of the Cross, and more.

CRS Rice Bowl

CRS Rice Bowl is Catholic Relief Services' Lenten solidarity program that brings Lent to life!

Through the Rice Bowl, we reach out to assist our brothers and sisters around the world through traditional Lenten practices, while we learn about the global issues affecting our neighbors overseas, as well as here in the United States. For more information, visit the [CRS Rice Bowl page](#) of the Archdiocese.

Formation Resources

Discover free-of-charge resources to supplement or enhance your lessons. Videos, lesson plans and other resources have been vetted by our review team, and are listed by general topic and by age group. Visit: <https://www.archmil.org/Catechesis/Technology/Formation-Resources.htm>

Do you have a favorite resource to share? Send us your suggestions under "Submit a Resource."

Contact Us

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Do you have an article, event or district meeting you would like included in the newsletter???

Please send information to: murphyjc@archmil.org

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