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August 26, 2020

**Fall 2020 Guidelines for Parish Programs  
K-6, Middle School, High School Faith Formation;  
Sacramental Preparation; RCIA; Adult Faith Formation**

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Faith formation, youth ministry and sacramental preparation will be different in the weeks and months to come. Going forward, there are many unknowns, but grace makes opportunities out of obstacles. Bishop Vetter is asking every parish to submit their plan for faith formation and sacramental preparation for people of all ages. He requests that every pastor consult with their Faith Formation teams and/or a group of impacted parents to craft a workable plan for each parish. This plan will need to be flexible. Please submit your plan by using this link: <https://web4u.forms-db.com/view.php?id=817174> at least two weeks prior to the beginning of the formation programs, and by September 25 at the latest.

It is possible, at this time, following proper guidelines and requirements, to meet in person. Local guidelines on masks, distancing, sanitation and group sizes must be respected.

**FAITH FORMATION AND SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION ARE NOT OPTIONAL. They must be done at the parish level. We cannot wait until the pandemic is over.**

Safe Environment protocols must be followed and maintained at all times.

**Faith Formation**

Each parish must take extra care and efforts to assist parents in their role as the primary catechists of their children. We encourage each parish's plan to be creative — borrow and share ideas and plans from each other.

The diocesan Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry (OYYAM), led by Kevin Molm, is ready to assist you with resources and ideas (see [dohyouth.org](http://dohyouth.org)) for all areas of faith formation and sacramental preparation. Bishop Vetter's online material could also be used.

The decision to meet in person or virtually is left to the local parish, respecting current guidelines. Regardless of what is decided, parishes should be prepared to adapt to changing circumstances. Regularly check with your local schools and health departments for guidance; consider following their lead.

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Consult with your parents and families to see what they want, what will be most helpful, and with what they are comfortable and able to do. Be mindful of access (or lack of access) to technology and the new stresses on family life: changing work expectations and environments, remote learning schedules, cancellation of extra-curricular activities, etc.

Parishes should consider options for both gathered and non-gathered ministry/formation.

- Gathered Ministry/Formation:
  - The group or class size (including everyone in the room) must be under 50.
    - As required by local directives, Masks are to be worn by everyone. Masks are not required for the teacher while teaching, with physical distancing provided.
    - Pick up and drop off times are to be staggered to avoid large gatherings of people.
    - Physical distancing provisions must be utilized whenever possible.
    - Classroom/meeting rooms surfaces must be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized after each session.
    - Treats/refreshments may be provided. They should be individually wrapped and distributed in each classroom/meeting room. Utmost care must be taken to ensure the safety of all food and beverage items.
  - If the group or class is greater than 50 — and you cannot maintain physical distancing, then you cannot meet in person.
- Non-Gathered Ministry/Formation:
  - If you cannot, or choose not to meet in person, parishes still have a responsibility to provide for the faith formation and sacramental preparation of their people. Parishes should research and use technologies or methods that will help the parish continue its mission in ways that are appropriate and responsible.
  - Parishes should ensure regular communication is maintained with all of its various groups, classes, young people, families, and parishioners.
- Overnight Retreats
  - Are not permitted at this time. This will be reconsidered when we reach Phase 3.

### **Sacramental preparation**

Sacramental preparation and sacramental requirements cannot be dismissed or waived on a local level. Only the Bishop can waive those requirements. This is particularly true for preparation for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation and Marriage.

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THE ROMAN CATHOLIC  
Diocese OF Helena

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Bishop Vetter encourages periodical in-person gatherings, following all respective guidelines for gathering of course, particularly for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation.

RCIA: This year, the Rite of Election will only be celebrated with the catechumens, not the Candidates for Full Communion. The time and date of this celebration will be announced later.

Baptism Formula – The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the specific approval of Pope Francis, has clarified that the only words that validly may be utilized for the Sacrament of Baptism are: “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” [The question arose as to whether “We baptize you ...” would be valid – it is not. Additionally, the cited instance involved prefacing the statement with naming the parents of the child, grandparents, others present, and the community, and then continuing “we baptize ...” [You can access the entire Decree on the Vatican website or by contacting Fr. Jeff Fleming.]

You Chancery Team is here to help; we are partners in ministry. We are just a phone call (406-442-5820) or email away ([jfleming@diocesehelena.org](mailto:jfleming@diocesehelena.org)).

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