

# Guide to Planning Religious Education, 2020-2021

This guide is to help parish catechetical leaders (PCLs) successfully plan for religious education in the 2020-2021 year. By following this guide, we are confident that your parish can be prepared for multiple scenarios this year. Please read this guide, work with your team, and let us at the diocese know how we can help further. With some creativity and flexibility, you can continue making disciples of Jesus Christ this year!

Please also see our [Religious Education COVID-19 Safe Protocols](#) for specific health and safety information.

## I. Laying the Foundation for a Strong Year

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Following the three keys below will help you build a strong foundation with your team of catechists and the parents you are ministering to this year. This foundation will serve you well if your parish needs to adjust due to pandemic, weather, unforeseen circumstances, etc.

**Action Item:** After reading this section, use these three keys as the focus of an initial meeting with your catechists, even *before* getting into the nitty-gritty of planning the year's schedule.

### PCL Formation & Catechist Formation

Before we catechize, we must first hear and receive the faith we are handing on. The word catechize means "to echo," and to echo we must first *listen*. No one is ever done learning about the faith or growing in relationship with our God! It is crucial that all PCLs actively tend to their own formation and lead their catechists in their formation as well. Here are some suggestions:

- Frequent participation in the Sacraments, especially Eucharist and Reconciliation
- Maintaining/developing an active prayer life and exploring the various prayer traditions of the Church, such as Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, Lectio Divina, Litanies, etc.
- Regular spiritual reading - make a goal of 1 or 2 books a year
- Participation in PCL Certification workshops
- Get to know your catechists – set aside time to share a meal and/or socialize with your team.
- Praying and meeting with catechists regularly – set up a schedule in advance
- Consider having at least one catechist retreat per year

### Pre-Evangelization & Evangelization

The goal of catechesis is to make disciples. To successfully do this, we must consider the process of evangelization. In the process of evangelization, catechesis ideally occurs after two other stages: pre-evangelization and evangelization.

**Pre-Evangelization:** Relationship building that leads to trust and opportunities to share the Gospel

**Evangelization:** Sharing the 'Good News' of Jesus Christ with others, leading to a conversion experience

We should not assume that parents or their children have already been evangelized. To make disciples, then, we cannot merely catechize (teach the faith). We also need to evangelize.

## Pre-Evangelization Activities

- Before the year begins, make sure to communicate thoroughly with families
  - Have an open house – set up times with families to walk through the facilities and explain drop-off and pick up.
  - Send a “meet the catechists” video home to families
  - Send a letter explaining procedures and welcoming all families to join the program
- Have safe get-to-know-you activities or family introductions
- Have small group discussions among parents
- Have ice-breaker questions or activities to begin each session
- Offer a ‘mom’ or ‘dad’ night out
- Host a family-friendly paint and sip event
- Host Theology on Tap for parents
- Have kids invite their friends to fun parish activities

## Evangelization Activities

- Personally invite families to a retreat, such as Light of the World
- Lead parents in using FORMED.org resources, such as “The Search” Series
- Have a parish mission focused on sharing the Gospel message with families
- Have a holy hour for families with a talk centered on the Gospel message

## Engage Parents

Young people are much more likely to continue practicing their faith if their parents are actively practicing. Our job as parish catechists is to supplement the parents’ teaching at home and support and equip parents to be the “primary catechists” of their children. This means we might even need to focus on the parents *more* than the kids in how we plan our programs. Many of the pre-evangelization and evangelization activities above have parents in mind. Below are some additional ideas to really focus on parents this year:

- Be sure that you have up-to-date contact information for parents
- Get to know each family personally
- Plan events for parents, either with or without kids
- Consider a “Family Formation” model for religious education
- Provide parents various opportunities, materials, tips, and prayers to grow in their spiritual journey
- Give parents tips on how to raise their kids in the Catholic Faith
- Set clear expectations for parents’ involvement in the program (don’t expect volunteers)
- Have regular communication to parents, such as a newsletter, that provides them with simple reminders about class and parish updates.

## II. Scheduling & Organizing the Religious Education Year

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We encourage each parish to be as creative and flexible in planning the upcoming year as possible. We are recommending that each parish has a plan A, B, and C. This might sound like a lot, but with the guided questions, we are confident you and your team can plan a year that your families can look forward to! All parish religious education programs should have a particular focus on supplementing the parents' efforts and supporting and equipping parents to lead their children to Christ.

In all of the following plans, you must be attentive to current local health and safety guidelines, especially from the Vermont Department of Health and the Office of Catholic Schools. The diocese will continue to keep you updated as these guidelines develop.

**Action Item:** After reading this section, meet with your catechists and priest and discuss what plans A, B, and C will look like in your parish - this might take a few meetings and some creative thinking. Next, be sure to clearly communicate this plan with everyone in the parish.

### Plan A

Plan A will serve as your best-case-scenario this year and as the basis for any adjustments. Current protocol makes it look like many religious education programs, with the proper adjustments, will be able to meet this fall. Considering schedules, peoples' comfort levels, and the needs of your parish, what would the ideal religious education schedule look like? Some questions to consider:

- What improvements can be made to last year's program?
- How often should we meet?
- Should some of the meetings be online?
- How can we equip parents to lead their children to Christ?
- Are we prepared to meet local health and safety requirements?
- How are we going to support parents in being primary catechists?

### Plan B

Plan B will serve as the back-up plan. Families should know about plan B before the year begins and be prepared for it on their end as well. All parishes should be prepared for a scenario where we are not able, or it becomes impractical, to meet in person again. Unlike this previous Spring, we have lots of time to plan ahead! How will your parish program proceed in quarantine? Having this plan in place should help you transition from A to B without missing a beat! Some questions to consider:

- What activities or resources would work well in your families' homes? Textbooks? Discussion questions? Activities? Games? Fun zoom calls? Weekly prayers?
- How can we best equip parents to confidently lead such in-home activities?
- Do all parish families have access to the internet?
- What strengths do we (parish leader and catechists) have that will help during this time?
- What *group* activities/discussions can we offer parents during this time?
- Based on Spring 2020, what is most difficult for these families in quarantine? Can the parish relieve any of those difficulties?
- How can we ensure that, from the beginning of the year, families are prepared for plan B?
- How will we effectively communicate the shift from plan A to plan B to families?

## Plan C

Plan C is what you will use on a case-by-case basis with families who, for one reason or another, are not taking part in the parish program but still want to be involved. Nothing is ever perfect, even with two plans in place! Some families may not be comfortable attending in-person. Other families may not have access to the internet. How will you reach those families and support those parents in their role as primary catechists?

Some questions to consider:

- If the “Smith” family doesn’t show up this year, how can we help them pass the faith on to the children?
- What is keeping the “Smith” family from participating with the parish?
- What is the family structure? How old are the children?
- Can we drop resources or games off at their home?
- How can we keep them connected with the parish and remind them that they have a community that loves and misses them?

## Creative Considerations

- Try online registration this year, using eCatholic’s form builder. Check out Nativity’s form here: <https://nativitystlouis.com/registration>
- Try religious education outside!
- Even if you don’t typically do “family formation,” consider having families attend together and doing group lessons. Families can sit together without distancing, and it may lead to a more communal atmosphere.
- Use the delayed Confirmations as an opportunity to keep these candidates engaged and involved in the parish this year, and beyond!
- If needed, hand-deliver home lessons or activities to parish families
- If needed, offer virtual parent sessions to check-in and support them as catechists of their children
- If needed, consider having multiple gathering times to reduce the number of people gathered
- Communicate in as many ways as possible in order to effectively reach your audience - phone calls, email, bulletin, social media, print.

## III. Sacramental Preparation

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### First Reconciliation & First Communion

Scheduling of First Reconciliation and First Communion, for parishes that were not able to do this in Spring 2020, is at the discretion of the pastor.

### Confirmation

The [2020 Fall Confirmation schedule](#) has been sent out to all PCLs and pastors.

Preparation for *new* candidates (normally 7th and 8th grade this year) should proceed as normal. Updated diocesan guidelines on Confirmation can be found at [www.vermontcatholic.org/religiouseducation](http://www.vermontcatholic.org/religiouseducation)

## IV. Diocesan Support

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### Virtual Meeting Series for all PCLs & Catechists

**Mid - July** – Laying a Foundation for a Strong Year

**Late July** – Plans A, B, & C ... Sharing and Discussion

**September (after classes have started)** – How are things going?

### Individual Meetings

If you would like to meet with me, either online or in-person, to help guide you through this process, please let me know! I would be happy to meet one-on-one or with your whole team.

### Call anytime!

Brainstorming? Confused? Have questions? Please know that you can call or email me anytime – I'd love to chat with you and listen to your situation. You are not in this alone.

Contact Michael Hagan at [mhagan@vermontcatholic.org](mailto:mhagan@vermontcatholic.org) or 802-448-3514

## V. Helpful Resources

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### Resources for Leaders, Catechists, and Parents

Online Resources:

- [Word on Fire](#) - Bishop Barron's evangelization ministry featuring many videos, articles, books, etc.
- [FORMED.org](#) - like a Catholic Netflix! Subscription required - check to see if your parish is signed up
- [Daily Readings of the Bible from USCCB](#) (or sign up to receive them in your email [here](#))
- [Read the Catechism in a Year](#) - free email sign-up
- [Hallow \(App\)](#) - guided prayers and meditations (Lectio Divina, Rosary, Ignatian Examen, etc.)

Suggested books:

- "Be Holy: A Catholic's Guide to the Spiritual Life" by Father Thomas Morrow
- "Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus" by Sherry A. Weddell
- "Introduction to the Devout Life" by St. Francis de Sales
- "Catechism of the Catholic Church"
- "United States Catholic Catechism for Adults"

### Health and Safety Information (as of 8/5/20)

[Religious Education COVID-19 Safe Protocols](#)

[Vermont Department of Health](#)

[Safety and Health Guidance for Reopening Schools, Fall 2020](#)

[VOSHA COVID-19 Training](#) - Required for all parish staff, recommended for all volunteers

(Vermont Mask Mandate) [Addendum 2 to Amended and Restated Executive Order NO. 01-](#)

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