

Covid Protocol Guidance For Parish Religious Education Programs
Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington
2021-2022 Religious Education School Year

As difficult as it is for us to realize, we still need health and safety measures this year, due to the ongoing pandemic. We have a duty of care to our students and volunteers to ensure we are providing them a safe and healthy learning environment. We were successfully able to safely operate Religious Education Programs in a variety of ways thus far, under very difficult conditions because of your support, creativity and commitment. Below are some health and safety considerations that Parish Religious Education Leaders and Priests should consider when planning their programs this year:

In-Person Learning: Religious Education Classes should take place in person to the extent possible. In the event that your school district goes to remote learning because of high case counts, you should have plans in place for remote learning in your Religious Education Program. However, for the most part your programs should be in person.

Masking: Due to the circulating and highly contagious Delta variant, the CDC recommends universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. The Diocese of Burlington recognizes that this is a suggestion and not a mandate, and we are encouraging you to look at the masking protocols that are in place in your local school communities, make a plan that will work best in your parish program and communicate it clearly to your volunteers and families.

Social Distancing: Many schools are doing away with the practice of social distancing in the classrooms, however some are choosing to keep a 3 foot distancing policy in place in the classrooms. Other schools are trying to limit exposure by not mixing groups/pods/grades etc. Other schools are trying to limit transmission by ensuring each student uses their own individual school supplies (such as crayons, markers, glue sticks etc.) Look at your classroom spaces, budgets, and do what makes sense for your program.

Meals & Snack Times: Last year we were encouraged to not have large meals together or to only offer pre-wrapped individually portioned food, or food students brought in for themselves for snack time. We all missed the fellowship of sharing meals together. Most schools this year are allowing eating in lunchrooms and cafeterias this fall to start the school year. If you are in a Family Formation style program where many ages are gathered, or having a program or parish wide event with food you may want to consider some of the following possibilities: having everyone remain masked while going through a food/buffet line, having servers serve the food to people if possible to limit transmission opportunities, having only children and parents from the same family eat together, having children take their food to the classroom, or even perhaps choosing not to have large group fellowship etc.

Sanitization & Hand Washing: Frequent Handwashing & Sanitizing should be encouraged as well as having hand sanitizer readily available by entrances, eating and classroom areas.

Cleaning: We would encourage all parishes to ensure continued vigilance in cleaning procedures- sanitizing tables, chairs, bathrooms, and other high use areas before and after each class or event.

Stay Home When Sick Practices: Anyone who is sick is encouraged to stay home. PCL's should work with families to provide an alternative learning method for families who are not able to attend your programs due to illness. Students or personnel exhibiting COVID symptoms should be sent home. Contact tracing with the Vermont Department of Health will continue when necessary. If you are contacted by the Vermont Department of Health please work with them to provide the necessary information and make sure that you keep your parish priest informed of any interactions with them.

Remote Learning Plans: In the event that your school district goes to remote learning because of high case counts, you should have plans in place for remote learning in your Religious Education Program, as well as how you will communicate that to your religious education families and program volunteers. You may also have families who are not comfortable with attending in person instruction this year. Parishes should have a plan in place of how they will walk with and support any families who wish to homeschool this year. If you need assistance with forming these plans please contact us.

Questions? The Diocesan Office of Pastoral Ministries is here to support you. This list of items to think about and plan for is by no means comprehensive but is meant to be a guide to help get your parish religious education programs off to a safe and healthy start again this year! Guidance is always changing, and we will attempt to communicate any guidance change as soon as possible. Please reach out to us with questions or concerns that your parish is facing and we will try our best to help you.

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