



Office of Education, Evangelization and Catechesis
Archdiocese of Hartford

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Dear parish ministers and Catholic school administrators:

On behalf of the Office of Education, Evangelization and Catechesis, thank you for your tireless work to continue to serve the faithful of our Archdiocesan parishes and the children of our Catholic schools. We know that this time of uncertainty can bring about much anxiety, and your enthusiasm, faith, and perseverance has provided a sign of great hope for all whom we serve.

Our current climate has required of us a new way of thinking and being “Church.” This challenge can be a great opportunity for us to overturn “the way we’ve always done it” and re-imagine how we foster relationships with Jesus Christ and cultivate discipleship.

To that end, the OEEC has prepared some guidance around faith formation and sacramental preparation in our parishes and schools. We ask that you review this guidance and share it with those catechists, Catholic school educators, and other volunteers in your charge. We pray that it is helpful and hope that you will be in continued contact with our office.

The Office of the Archbishop has sent this guidance to all the priests of the Archdiocese this afternoon.

Be assured of our continued prayers for your vital ministries. In this season of Lent, may our time of distance and hunger draw each of us in closer spiritual communion to the Lord who is merciful, knows our suffering and hears our every prayer.

Sincerely in Christ,

Sr. Mary Grace Walsh

Provost for Education, Evangelization and Catechesis



GUIDANCE FOR FAITH FORMATION IN A TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

FAITH FORMATION IN THESE TIMES

OUR CHALLENGE

The people of the Archdiocese of Hartford need the support of their parish communities now more than ever, as social distancing becomes the temporary “new normal” and precautions limit our abilities to proceed in the usual ways. Our challenges as facilitators of parish life and ministries are to accompany them through these difficult times, and to provide as much as we can to support and nourish their faith.

OUR MISSION

This current environment has caused great anxiety for all of the people of God, especially those being prepared to receive the sacraments. It is crucial for all parish ministers to continue to reach out to the faithful of their communities during these trying times. Embedded within these difficult days is a pearl of opportunity: to re-imagine “the way we’ve always done it” and engage creative means to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, develop strong domestic churches, and form missionary disciples despite physical limitations.

COMMUNICATION AND RESOURCES

The Office of Education, Evangelization and Catechesis will continue to be in regular communication with parish ministers, to provide consultation, resources and ongoing support. Please visit the OEEC website, www.CatholicEdAOHCT.org, to view collated resources for catechetical leaders, youth ministers, RCIA team members, Catholic school educators, and more. Please also keep abreast of your email inbox (and check your spam folder regularly) for communications from our office.

STAFF SUPPORT

During these days, the OEEC, as well as other staff from the Pastoral Center, will be working remotely. The physical limitations of these times does not inhibit our availability to support you in any way that we can. We are working to constantly update our available resources, stay in communication as plans adapt, and provide a listening ear.

While OEEC staff will be checking their voicemails remotely, it is best to send an email and reach the staff directly and quickly. Please feel free to contact the OEEC for the following matters:

- **Catholic Biblical School:** Barbara Jean Daly Horell, Archdiocesan Director of Catholic Biblical School: barbara.jean.horell@aohct.org
- **Catholic School Faith Formation:** Lisa Orchen, Archdiocesan Director of Catechetical Initiatives: Lisa.Orchen@aohct.org
- **Catholic Scouting:** Jennifer McClintock, Archdiocesan Coordinator of Catholic Scouting: Jennifer.mcclintock@aohct.org
- **Faith Formation/Religious Education, Family Catechesis, Sacramental Preparation of Children/Youth:** Kelly Henderschedt, Archdiocesan Director of Catechesis: kelly.henderschedt@aohct.org
- **RCIA, Adult Confirmation, Adult Faith Formation:** Nicole M. Perone, Archdiocesan Director of Adult Faith Formation: Nicole.perone@aohct.org
- **RICA, Confirmación de Adultos, Catequesis para Hispanos:** Ana Maria Hernandez Alstrum, Archdiocesan Director of Hispanic Catechesis: ana.maria.alstrum@aohct.org
- **Youth Ministry, Young Adult Ministry:** Michael Wellington, Archdiocesan Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry: Michael.wellington@aohct.org

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION GUIDANCE

We encourage parish ministers to treat this moment as an opportunity to reflect on the true spirit and goal of sacramental preparation, and critically consider the revision of processes to focus on developing relationships with Jesus Christ through conversion of hearts.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION REQUIREMENTS

At this time, any requirements placed on sacramental formation (such as retreats, service hours, etc.) must be adapted, so long as they do not conflict with canon law or specific Rites.

Due to the current situation, please remove retreats and service hours from the burden of expectation for those preparing to receive sacraments. They should not be required for admission to a sacrament. No sacraments should be prohibited due to a lack of requirements at this time.

If specific chapters or sessions of sacramental preparation were unable to be presented in the traditional way for those in sacramental preparation, we encourage the visioning of post-sacramental catechesis and the experience of Mystagoga.

COMMUNICATING WITH THOSE IN FORMATION

Mindful that parishes are in different places with their sacramental formation processes, it is important that the parish catechetical leader who coordinates sacramental formation plan on having weekly communication with those preparing for the sacraments.

- Adults: Communicate directly with them.
- Children: Communicate with the parent/legal guardian.

NOTES ABOUT SPECIFIC SACRAMENTS

FIRST RECONCILIATION AND FIRST HOLY COMMUNION FOR CHILDREN

At this time, some dates for First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion have not yet been impacted. Possible changes cannot yet be predicted; however, we recommend that each parish should, in consultation with their pastor, discuss backup options. An example includes smaller groups on various Sundays throughout the summer, as First Holy Communions can be celebrated during any Mass (provided that children have celebrated First Reconciliation prior). However, we do not yet recommend changing plans.

YOUTH CONFIRMATION

Questions have arisen regarding Confirmation of youth, in light of some ceremonies needing to be cancelled or postponed. While the OEEC stands ready to assist in re-imagining formation for the sacrament in the current climate, the scheduling of youth Confirmations takes place through the Office of the Archbishop.

RCIA AND ADULT CONFIRMATION

Many parish ministers have inquired regarding the continuance of RCIA gatherings and Adult Confirmation classes. The Archdiocese of Hartford and the state of Connecticut have strongly encouraged the limitation of group meetings, and public Masses (both Sundays and weekdays) have been suspended. This can be challenging for sacramental preparation, but is not impossible.

We encourage creative ways to continue the formation of your elect, candidates, and confirmandi in community. Consider tools such as GoToMeeting, Zoom, Google Hangout, Facebook, and FreeConferenceCall to allow for group video conferencing or conference phone calls wherein groups can still “gather” in the digital sphere. Whether by phone conference call, email threads, or video conferencing, by utilizing what resources are available to connect groups remotely, prayerful reflection, catechesis, and Lenten formation can continue. As our Lord said in the Gospel of Matthew, “Where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” Gathering need not be in-person!

**Please keep as your goal to honor the Rite of Christian Initiation
and adult sacramental preparation most authentically, with the timeframes, capacities, and
precautions that exist.**

RCIA SCRUTINIES AND PRESENTATIONS

If the date of initiation should be moved, the Scrutinies and Presentations should take place in advance of that date and need not be provided for at this time.

If our environment of worship is still prohibitive at the time that Scrutinies and Presentations would take place, the RCIA team should provide resources for those in the RCIA process to engage in prayer and reflection around those celebrations.

- This could include, but is not limited to: sending by email the readings to pray over in the spirit of *lectio divina*, written reflections, and the intercessions associated with each celebration.
- If your parish has the technological capacity to do so, this can be done via a virtual gathering (e.g. Zoom or GoToMeeting) so that the RCIA team can facilitate the group reflection on the scriptures associated with each of the Scrutinies and Presentations.

LOOKING TOWARD TRIDUUM

At this time, we are awaiting further decision about the celebration of Triduum and the reception of elect and candidates into the fullness of Christian initiation at the Easter Vigil. We are cognizant that plans may need to change. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults allows for this: “For pastoral needs of a more serious nature, however, it is lawful to arrange the schedule for the entire rite of initiation differently...” (RCIA 17)

It is the privilege of the Archbishop of Hartford, per RCIA 34, to determine that the Rite of Christian Initiation should be celebrated outside of the normative time, to dispense with one or two of the scrutinies as needed, and to permit the simple rite to be used. If that determination is made, further guidance will be provided, and the rites which normally occur during the Period of Purification and Enlightenment, as well as the Sacraments of Initiation which normally occur at the Easter Vigil may be celebrated at another time. (RCIA 26)

A REMINDER ABOUT CANDIDATES (BAPTIZED ADULTS SEEKING FULL INITIATION)

It is the wisdom of the Rite that those adults who are already baptized and are candidates in the RCIA (that is, seeking First Communion and Confirmation) are not limited to reception of the sacraments at the Easter Vigil. (Archdiocesan RCIA Guidelines, chapter 1, section 5). Therefore, their reception should not be significantly impacted by a potential change of dates of initiation.

ADULT CONFIRMATION

Questions have arisen about the reception of adults seeking solely the sacrament of Confirmation, which normatively takes place at the Archdiocesan Adult Confirmation ceremony celebrated by the Archbishop. No changes have yet been planned for that celebration, scheduled for May 5. Please continue to prepare your adult confirmandi in the manners already addressed herein. Should plans for Adult Confirmation change, guidance will be provided.