



Parish Youth Ministry Guidelines

Office of High School and Middle School Ministry

The State of Michigan Plan

Phase 3 (According to the [State of Michigan Safe Start Plan](#))

If a parish is located in a Phase 3 MERC District, as described in the MI Safe Start Plan, the parish does not have the option of holding in-person youth ministry gatherings outside of worship specific gatherings. You are encouraged to provide support to your families to encounter the Lord in their homes and to engage in faith formation as a family, including sacramental preparation as well as whatever worship gatherings that are held at their parish.

Phase 4 (According to the [State of Michigan Safe Start Plan](#))

If a parish is located in a Phase 4 MERC District, as described in the MI Safe Start Plan, the parish has the option of holding in-person gatherings. First, you will find a list of considerations which may help you in your planning. Following that are guidelines which must be adhered to if in-person gatherings occur on your campus.

Our Current Situation

As of today, August 13, 2020, all ten counties of the Diocese of Lansing are in Phase 4 of the MI State Safe Start Plan. In this phase it is permissible to have in-person gatherings at the local parish. The state has provided comprehensive safety guidelines for various situations. **We will adhere to the part of the plan which pertains to schools, the [MI Safe Schools plan](#).** Below, you will find lists of required actions, taken from the state plan that must be adhered to if in-person gatherings are to be held in a parish building, including those for youth ministry. You will also find “Things to Consider” sections which will provide some creative ideas for you.

No matter the restrictions regarding COVID-19, we, as the leaders of parish communities are obligated to provide faith formation and/or support to our families/individuals to live out their faith, including sacramental preparation. For many of you this includes sacramental preparation for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation. We will be releasing a separate document with some ideas you can use for this purpose, and to share with families to encourage them to engage in sacramental prep at home.



Guiding Principles

Parents and Families

In this particular circumstance we have an opportunity to refocus the faith formation that we offer our parish communities. This does not mean ‘dumbing down’ the content that we provide. Instead, our energy should be in providing strong but simple expressions of the faith together with solid spiritual activities. This means focusing on what is most essential. It is these methods which produce responses of faith. Particular attention should be given to how your plan will include fostering the parent’s faith, or even initiating if that is necessary. Most youth ministry programs do not include a lot of parent engagement other than those parents who are volunteers or chaperones. At this time you will want to offer resources to parents so that they can be more involved in their teen’s discipleship, including resources for preparing their youth to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation where applicable. We will be providing some resources for this, but you can also direct parents to Formed.org, Ascension Press, Lifeteen.com or ProjectYM among others. Encourage parents to use these resources to talk about the faith with their teens.

In-Person Gatherings

Each Youth Minister should assess their parish community for willingness to attend youth gatherings. You can use Survey Monkey or Google Surveys for this. **If there are willing participants then in-person gatherings should be attempted.** (Though you may want to continue to offer something online as well for those not comfortable gathering in person.) This will require assessment of many factors. Will the pastor allow it? Are young people willing to attend? Are their parents comfortable with in-person gatherings? Is the Youth Minister comfortable meeting in-person? Are volunteers willing to participate? Will it be possible to operate under the proper safety recommendations? Will you have enough personnel to perform the requirements for hygiene and sanitization without overworking oneself?

Small Groups

Given that we can only meet in small groups at this time, this is an excellent opportunity to form some small groups of teens from your parish who you can meet with to accompany and mentor them. This can certainly be done online (with parental permission) but if possible try to meet in person. If you have enough adult volunteers who are safe-environment compliant, you can meet with multiple small groups on your parish campus while maintaining social distance. If possible to meet outside you can avoid having to sanitize everything by having them bring their own lawn chair or sitting on the grass. This is a great format for discipling, prayer, bible study or even faith formation.



Personal Check In

Some youth ministers are having success checking in directly with teens. With parental permission, some are able to call or email/message teens directly to check in on how they are doing, ask if they need prayers for anything, pray with them, talk about what God is doing in their life, etc.... You will want to check if this is okay with parents first, and perhaps even use their phone number or email to check in.

Practical Things to Consider:

For In-person meetings:

- Consider starting later than usual to buy yourself some time to coordinate your efforts.
- Stagger youth ministry gatherings in order to minimize the number of people in the building at one time, particularly at the beginning and end of your sessions.
- Consider using multiple entrances/exits for pick-up and drop-off.
- Employ small group strategies.
 - Small group gatherings encourage discussion among participants which fosters relationship and response to truth.
 - Small groups allow for greater flexibility in both location and time of meeting, even allowing for different groups to meet on different days rather than the typical youth ministry model of meeting once a week at the same time.
 - Small groups provide a greater opportunity for our youth to be noticed, named and known. There is more room for in depth conversation and digging into concerns and issues than large group settings.

Sacramental Preparation

Parishes will need to discern ways to accompany families in preparing their children to receive the sacraments. Unless public liturgies are suspended, we cannot withhold the sacraments from those who wish to participate in them. Those who desire to commune with Jesus Christ should be given the opportunity to do so. Canon Law specifies that families are capable of fostering this desire and forming their child's disposition to receive the sacrament in a worthy manner. Most families will, however, need encouragement and assistance to accomplish this.

Emphasis should be placed on the desire of the child to commune with Jesus Christ. The parent's goal is to foster that desire and to form the disposition of the child toward the sacrament. The best thing a parish can do is to help the parent and child encounter Jesus together so they have the opportunity to respond to him as a gift from God, the Father.



Immediate preparation for each particular sacrament can be accomplished via small groups, one-on-one meetings, where safety concerns can be addressed by proper procedures.

Required Guidelines for In-Person Faith Formation:

Personal Protective Equipment

- All staff will wear facial coverings when in classrooms, unless face coverings cannot be medically tolerated as documented through written and signed verification by a physician.
- All staff and students in grades 6-12 will wear facial coverings, unless face coverings cannot be medically tolerated as indicated by the parent/guardian.
- Provided that all Diocese of Lansing Mass guidelines are followed, masses are allowed.
- Facial coverings may be homemade or disposable level one/basic-grade surgical masks.
- Face-shields are **not** an acceptable form of face covering.

Hygiene

- Provide adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors (including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol for safe use by staff and students, paper towels, tissues, and signs reinforcing proper handwashing techniques).
- Teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and/or the safe use of hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Educate staff and students on how to cough and sneeze into their elbows, or to cover with a tissue. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed immediately using proper hand hygiene techniques.
- Systematically and frequently check and refill soap and hand sanitizers.
- Encourage the use of personal supplies such as writing utensils, papers to eliminate the sharing of supplies.
- Families are to inform you of any positive cases of COVID-19 of Religious Education participants.



Spacing, Movement and Access

- Social distancing is required with all gatherings. Students should be spaces as far apart as possible in classrooms, whether desks or tables are utilized. They may be as close as 4 feet apart if everyone is wearing a mask. If there are students who cannot wear a mask then students should be at least 6 feet apart.
- Class sizes are limited to space available to meet the distance requirements. We are not bound by any particular number of participants.
- Post signage to indicate proper social distancing.
- A drop off and pick up procedure must be established that keeps all families 6 feet apart.
- Place markers at six-foot intervals where line formation is anticipated.
- Provide social distancing markers in waiting and reception areas.
- Post signs on the doors of restrooms to indicate proper social distancing and hand hygiene techniques.
- Work with your parents to limit traffic in the parish/school building during RE to that which is absolutely necessary as determined by parish officials. All non-staff adults entering the building must wear a facial covering.
- Symptomatic students and staff sent home will stay home until they have tested negative or have completely recovered according to CDC guidelines.

Screening Attendees and Staff

- Families are encouraged to check their child's temperature at home using oral, tympanic, or temporal scanners; students with a temperature of 100.4 or greater should stay home and consider coronavirus testing if symptoms of COVID-19 are present.
- Notify parents that you expect them to keep their teens at home if they are ill. Families are encouraged to monitor their children for symptoms of COVID-19. The presence of any symptoms, including cough or shortness of breath, should prompt the family to keep the student home from school and to follow up with a primary care provider.
- Identify and designate a quarantine area and a staff person to care for teens and staff who develop signs or symptoms of COVID-19 at the parish.
- Youth Ministers will conduct daily self-examinations, including a temperature check, prior to coming to work. If they exhibit any new or unusual symptoms associated with COVID-19 they will stay home and either cancel the scheduled session or find adequate substitutes.



Cleaning

- Work with your janitorial staff who are the experts in your building in this area.
- Youth Rooms, desks and chairs along with frequently touched surfaces including light switches, doors, benches, bathrooms, will undergo cleaning after each faith formation session with either an EPA-approved disinfectant or diluted bleach solution. (See Diocesan Guidelines, “Guide-Cleaning and Application of Disinfectant in a Pandemic Situation 2020-7.”)
- Supplies used during sessions will undergo cleaning after every class period or when cohorts change rooms, with either an EPA-approved disinfectant or diluted bleach solution.
- Ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaning and disinfection products, including storing products securely away from children, and with adequate ventilation when staff use products.
- It is recommended that Staff wear gloves and an appropriate mask when performing all disinfecting activities.