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Protocol for Physically Gathering for Catechesis during COVID-19 Pandemic

The global pandemic which hit our planet in the winter of 2020 has changed much of what we had taken for granted in our lives, and the way we live them. Included among this is the way we interact with one another and the way we gather as a community of people. It has had a deep impact on the way we are Church.

Quickly, and without any preparation, we needed to suspend catechetical sessions; we were for a time unable to gather as a community of believers for Eucharist and even now those gatherings are not in any way normal; the celebration of sacraments was postponed.

Almost 6 months later, we here in NB have not encountered the same difficulties as other regions of Canada, and in other parts of the world. This may have made us somewhat complacent. The initial precautions we took having been relaxed, it has become easier to let down our guard.

The province of New Brunswick and the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (Public Health) are keeping us well informed about the province-wide progression of Covid-19. They have also provided clear directives on how we are to gather, including the cautious return of our children and staff to public schools. The re-opening of public schools is motivation for those involved in children's catechesis to resume our catechetical gatherings. Together we will work through the challenges we may face as we resume sessions.

The provincial guidelines for the return to school have provided valuable resource material for the preparation of this document, which aims to capture issues in need of consideration.

Protocol for Catechetical Gatherings:

- To ensure appropriate physical distancing between families, tables must be placed 2 meters – 6 feet - apart; therefore if the gathering space does not permit, there should only be as many families in each session as can respect the physical distancing
- Families may only attend the session for which they are registered. The option to gather at another parish or another session has been temporarily suspended
- Screening questions will be asked of families upon arrival. Attendance sheets will be pre-filled with the parent and child's names and contact information - which is verified and checked upon arrival. A signature will not be necessary. Only peel and stick nametags are to be used

Face masks must be worn by both adults and children upon arrival and until they are seated. It is suggested children enter with their hands clasped behind their backs to reduce the risk of touching others. No hugging or handshaking

- Hand-sanitizing stations must be visited, and physical distancing be observed upon arrival. There will be clearly marked entrance and exit lines with visual, directional cues when necessary or when physical barriers create an issue. Participants will be monitored to ensure they follow the cues
- Handouts will be prepared ahead of time and placed on the tables before the families arrive. The NB Department of Education notes: "At this time there is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted via textbooks, paper or other paper-based products. As such there is no need to limit the distribution or sharing of books or paper-based educational resources to students because of COVID-19."

- Families will need to bring their own supplies for activities, i.e. pencils, pens, erasers, markers, scissors, crayons or pencil crayons, sharpener, scissors, glue, tape, stapler, etc.

- There will be no activities requiring physical contact between families; themes will be adjusted as necessary. There is to be no singing; music can be listened to or participants can hum along. These modifications may impact the length of each of our sessions
- No snacks for children; no tea/ coffee for adults. If necessary, families can bring their own food and beverage to consume before the session
- Frequently touched surfaces such as tables, chairs, doorknobs, handrails, as well as washrooms, will be cleaned and sanitized daily and after use. Parents should accompany children to the washroom
- Public Health Guidelines indicate that participants exhibiting two or more symptoms of COVID-19 should refrain from attending sessions, and contact Telecare at 811. The NB Department of Education notes: “Students or school personnel who have been identified by their primary care provider as having asthma, seasonal allergies or who suffer from chronic runny nose/nasal congestion are not required to be excluded based on these symptoms.”
- If a child / adult does not attend school / work on any given day because he or she does not feel well, or has any kind of symptoms, we ask they not attend catechism that evening
- In the case of an outbreak-related school or class closure which involves your child, parents are asked to keep their child home from catechism
- Information posters illustrating proper handwashing procedures and mask use will be posted in visible locations

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