

St. Francis of Assisi ~ Faith Formation
1031 Chenango Street
Binghamton, NY 13901
607-722-4177

August 21, 2020

Dear Parents or Guardians,

Wow! That's really all I can say, what a year it's been! Let me start by saying thank you for all you do for your children, for doing your best in navigating this complicated and uncharted territory and for being open to the new experiences that are coming your way. This year school will be very different! And that is true for the children of St. Francis of Assisi Parish. I ask you to please take a couple minutes to **thoroughly read this letter as much has changed and much will be determined by whether or not school is in session. With that said, hopefully, Faith Formation will begin October 18th at 9:30 AM, with opening prayer for children and parents in the gym. The delay in starting will give you time to adjust to your new school schedules.**

This is our plan, which follows the diocesan guidelines. We will offer Faith Formation for Grades K-1-3-4-5-6-7-8-9 as either/or/and. This means that you can choose to attend face-to-face classes socially distanced. If your child is sick or you have a conflict you are welcome to go online and complete the weekly lesson and submit it to me for attendance. Masks must be worn by everyone, and parents will need to self screen their children and themselves before coming to classes. Please do not come to Faith Formation if you or ANYONE in your household is sick. We'll have a drop box form for you to register who dropped off or picked up your child—attendance will be an adequate way of tracking the catechists and students. There will be one way traffic through the building. I'll spray the classrooms/railing/bathrooms, etc. with Lysol (or a similar disinfectant) before and after sessions. We will meet in the classrooms unless stated on the calendar. If parents choose the online only option they will be required to send in a weekly assessment. This especially important for Grades 8-9 (pre Confirmation) as it can effect your child's readiness for direct preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Given the either/or/and option in a perfect world we should have 100 % attendance. I also will plan to do 2 or 3 LEAP "family" events but how they are implemented is still to be determined, if school is in session we could meet in the gym—socially distanced with a table/family. If school is online then we must also be online. The family sessions will be especially important for the family's that choose the online only option. Mass, at this time, can be online as well. It is important that you and your family still watch a virtual Mass—or attend Mass. As I've said before nothing makes sense to our children without an understanding liturgy.

For children preparing for 2021 Sacraments, First Reconciliation/First Eucharist and Confirmation I'm hoping to have face-to-face sessions. Perhaps not every week but that is to be determined by the school districts. I really think it is especially important for the children to have a sense of community and a good understanding of what a Sacrament is. Again, Mass attendance, in-person or virtually is also very important. First Sacraments can, hopefully, meet as usual—as I am expecting <12 children. Parents have always "coached" their children so I think the process will work this year. Confirmation, hopefully, can meet as usual, if we need to do it with Zoom, Mr. Santa Croce and I can do that. I am expecting 19 Confirmandi this year. Retreat guidelines are expected to change and as yet are being determined. I will have a retreat following the diocesan guidelines. The date and format will be known by our October 6th meeting.

With all of that said please fill out the enclosed registration form regarding our Faith Formation Program. **This is my permanent record for the year and it is very important that the form is filled out.** There is only one form per family. Register **only** the children who will be participating in the Faith Formation Program, oldest to youngest. Do not register students who will be Confirmed on September 13, 2020. The fee is \$35/child or \$70/family. Please return the fee and registration form by October 1st. You can drop it in the collection box or mail it to Maria Kirk, at the above address. Faith Formation is never contingent on your ability to pay, if you cannot pay, please register your children anyway.

If you are a member of another parish, but your children attend Faith Formation classes here, please be aware that **your pastor** needs to write a letter to Fr. Tim giving his authorization for your children to be catechized here. This is a diocesan policy. If you are members here I encourage you to attend weekly Mass at St. Francis' especially if your child is preparing for a sacrament. If you are not a member of any parish, but have your children catechized here, please come into my office and take a moment to fill out the registration form to join St. Francis' parish, and make attendance at Mass a priority in your family. Our church is sanitized after each Mass and reconfigured to observe social distancing.

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops requires that all dioceses train and screen any adult that works or volunteers in any church facility. Our diocese provides Safe Environment training for all employees and volunteers. The diocese is also required by the USCCB to provide training for all children in child sexual abuse and awareness. The diocese is using a program called "Circles of Care" to provide this training. Please go online to www.syrdio.org to peruse this program. You can also view it in my office. It is really very well done. This training will be on November 22nd during class time. I will hand out additional information regarding this training in early November. Feel free to stop in the office to look at the materials at any time.

Our First Sacraments Program (Reconciliation and Eucharist) requires parents to attend two information meetings, and participate in two "coaching" classes with their children. These classes, one for each sacrament, will help you be more comfortable in forming your child's faith. There are two liturgies in which the children participate, as well as the celebration of First Reconciliation, the mini-retreat in February, a Sharing Meal in March, and of course First Eucharist May 2, 2021. I will have the first parent meeting **October 25th in the parish hall**, socially distanced, during the Faith Formation hour to review the process for the sacrament of reconciliation. Some option of weekly attendance at Mass is required.

All students in 10th grade or older who have not been confirmed should be enrolled in **direct** preparation classes. In order to **begin** direct preparation for Confirmation, candidates must have had regular attendance in prior Faith Formation classes or been enrolled in parochial school. Other signs of readiness include a personal faith consciousness, an appreciation of Sacred Scripture, a communal faith life as demonstrated by participation in weekly Mass, a sense of service, and a sense of Christian identity. Weekly attendance at Mass here at St. Francis is expected. **There will be an orientation meeting regarding the Sacramental process for Parents and Candidates, Tuesday, October 6th at 7:00 PM in the Parish Hall. All candidates and a parent must attend this meeting.** Students will begin classes on November 8th, participate in the Rite of Acceptance December 6th and celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation in the fall of 2021.

Our LEAP "family" Events will be schedule with at least 3 weeks notice, and will usually take place during the regular Faith Formation time frame. The LEAP event is part of our Faith Formation Program and is not optional. It is designed to be family faith time that provides a different kind of catechetical experience for you and your children.

Please join Faith Formation on Remind. Remind is a quick way to send you updates, especially in the case of a severe weather closing. You can have reminders sent to your phone or email or both and it's completely private. A separate group will be created for First Eucharist and Confirmation families later. If you registered last year, you are in the group, if you're unsure just re-register. If you have any questions, please call Maria Kirk at 607-222-1477. I am always open for any comments or feedback you may have regarding Faith Formation. **The registrations forms should be returned with your registration fee by October 1st.** You can return them by mail or drop them in the collection box, to my attention. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Maria Kirk, Director of Faith Formation

Fr. Tim Taugher, Pastor