



Our Lady of Lourdes
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2020-2021 Religious Education / “Virtual Reality”

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

October 12, 2020

Dear Parish Staff, Finance Council, and Pastoral Council,

The term “virtual reality” (VR) means an immersive, computer-generated environment that enables users to react the same way they would in real life. Video games, glasses, and goggles are often packaged as VR. At Lourdes, VR is not an electronic ecosystem but rather a faithful commitment by our parish staff and volunteers to use technology and information to allow us to be in community at this time.

This is to communicate my gratitude for the effort of our parish staff in Religious Education and parish administration, liturgy, and music to help us with our version of VR in this pandemic of 2020. Through many hours of effort, they are continuing to make the real life of faith and sacraments of First Penance, First Communion and Confirmation possible.

Our Religious Education staff have worked diligently all Spring, Summer, and Autumn to get us up and running for classes for Grades 1-6 & First Communion (Barbara Camp), Grades 7-12 & Confirmation (Monica Nieves). Annemarie Grasso is administrative assistant for all grades and receives registrations and keeps our records for the program.

Thank you to Carol Ford (bulletin), to Linda Chapman and Manny Figueiredo for the music/liturgy and to Paul Hirsch for church and liturgy assistance, liturgical ceremonies and video/photos. Chris Victor is a great help overseeing the buildings and grounds on Sundays and at the Sacramental celebrations. Many of them wear more than one hat!

I’d like to share and thank everyone for these achievements and comment on a few things still in the works:

1. **From “Shelter in Place” to ZOOM:** In Spring 2020 and Summer 2020 – in lieu of in-person classes, Barbara Camp (Grades 1-6) and Monica Nieves (Grades 7-12) started meeting with young people using Zoom. Barbara and Monica have worked diligently to adapt their program to this new format and been taking advantage of the connectivity that provide some “outside the classroom” benefit, such as individual Q&A with students. We also held an official ceremony for all those who were finishing Grade 6 and “moving up” to Grade 7. This was also on Zoom.

2. **Sacrament of First Holy Communion**: on 3 separate summertime dates, we held First Communion for 23 children. This involved considerable planning and communication -- and multiple Zoom conferences --- to be sure our young people had completed their 2019-2020 curriculum and were prepared for these dates. Also, these 3 First Communion Masses were livestreamed, videotaped, photographed. Diana Dizon, a member of our parish and choir, was a great help in distributing the video-photo media with individual emails. There are many parishes - right now - doing their "autumn" First Communions to finish from last Spring. We are ahead of the game! Thank you to Barbara, Annemarie, Linda, Manny and the whole team of volunteers to make this happen.

3. **NOTE on Autumn 2020 "1st Penance" Meetings**: Families with children in 1st Penance are to meet with Barbara on these Saturdays in October and November:

Sat. Oct. 10 @ 3:30 pm, Sat. Oct. 17 @ 3:30 pm, Sat. Oct. 24 @ 3:30 pm
(note: Sat. Oct. 31 omitted)**

Sat. Nov. 7 @ 3:30 pm, Sat. Nov. 14, 2020 @ 3:30 pm, Sat. Nov 21 @ 03:30 pm

4. **Sacrament of Confirmation** on Sept. 27, 8 young people were confirmed by Bishop Manuel Cruz (Essex County Auxiliary Bishop) at Sunday Mass. Thank you to Monica, Annemarie and Linda Chapman & Manny Figueiredo (music) for making this happen "on schedule" with all the regular elements of retreat, rehearsal, and the Rosary-gift/box for the candidates. Bishop Cruz remarked that he was delighted to be with us and looks forward to returning in September 2021.

5. **Google Classroom, Gmail Accounts and More**: "Our Lady of Lourdes" applied for and received status as "registered non-profit" for access to the complete G Suite suite of Google technology for education. This gives us the ability to create our own Google Classroom and Gmail accounts, at no charge to the parish. We are using a platform similar to public schools, colleges, and universities. Thank you to Barbara, Monica, and Annemarie for your considerable effort to collect the necessary "registration information" from families, communicate this to our young people, and maintain the data. It has been a very busy summer and autumn!

6. **Gmail Requirement at Registration**: when registering, children / families need Google / Gmail. For those without, they need to create one. We keep track of these.

7. **New Online Registration System**: this year, for the first time, we accepted registrations submitted fully "online" via the website. I am grateful to Annemarie for working with Barbara, Monica, and me to implement this on our website.

8. **QuickBooks System for Tuition and Payment**: about a year ago, we created a Religious Education dedicated QuickBooks account for tracking of tuition. This information from the Religious Education system is then integrated into our regular parish books and records. Annemarie worked with our accountant, Frank Silvestri, to get this up and running.

9. **Protecting God's Children / Safe Environment Notes:** we are doing the following:

- Continue background checks and safe environment training for volunteers and employees.
- Two "Protecting God's Children" classes taught in August by Barbara Camp.
- Ensure 2+ adults "online" in class. No adult is "online" alone with children.
- Jeri Konvalinka, bookkeeper, is our "Local Safe Environment Coordinator". With Jeri's oversight, we have our volunteers in the national database (Virtus)
- Annemarie Grasso works closely with Jeri, Barbara, Monica, me and to inform volunteers of the steps they need to take to get registered or stay in compliance with required documentation.

10. Salute to our Volunteers: in recent years, we have been blessed with many new caring and capable volunteers who bring gifts of Christian hospitality, charity and professional competency to Religious Education and the necessary technology infrastructure. It is a sign of growth and hope for Lourdes that you are with us on this journey of faith formation.

The West Orange (Lourdes/St. Joseph) Knights of Columbus gave \$1,100 to Religious Education at Lourdes, specifically for the purpose of providing a tablet or device to a family in need. We are currently looking into what we might provide. The money, nevertheless, remains restricted for this purpose.

Our webmaster/technology support at NeoWeb IT (Joseph Cece and Matthew Cece) have also provided both connectivity and wise counsel at this time.

I am grateful for many behind-scenes contributions by Religious Education staff and for the volunteer efforts that make these programs possible in terms of catechetical teaching, hospitality, distribution of books, checking of homework and many other tasks.

In a few months, I hope our Religious Education staff and volunteers can gather formally and in person to share ideas. In the interim, let's stay in touch. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out to me.

In Christ's Peace,

Father Jim Ferry, Pastor

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts by the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. (1 Corinthians 12:4-5)