

COVID-19: Altering the Status Quo

Parish Communication

CONSIDERATIONS BY MARK MOGILKA

During this time of COVID-19, we hear how important it is to communicate, communicate, communicate. The goal is to provide support, pastoral care, and maintain and or build relationships within our parish communities. Catechesis, youth and adult formation, and spiritual direction are important during this time – but accompaniment, providing support and sustaining relationships (as never before), must be the focus now.

Pope Francis invites us to pursue the “*art of accompaniment*,” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other. Given the ratio of priests/pastors to parishioners, now more than ever, the importance of the role of staff and trained lay people to accompany parishioners will be a key to successful parish communities in the future.

Given the amount of information and connectedness among parish communities, are there any other means of communication we should be thinking about?

- **Personal emails:** It is a good idea to check in on parishioners with a personal note.
- **Group emails** are helpful, but we need to be careful. These can easily be relegated to a spam or junk folder. Ask your parishioners how often they would like to receive emails from the parish. Once a week is probably fine. There are parishes who send daily emails and, as a result, find out that only a small percentage open them or read past the introductory note. A much smaller percentage click a second time on links – especially if there are many links contained in the email.
- **Website:** Now is a good time to update the parish website. Few people will return to a parish website filled with information that is out of date.
- **Town Hall Meeting:** Consider holding a virtual town hall meeting to gather your community. Provide information about happenings around your parish and neighborhood and encourage participants to use the chat box to ask their questions and share ideas. Record questions and comments so your parish leadership can respond to questions and affirm good suggestions or ideas that get shared.
Parishioners unable to connect via video conference can often still connect via their telephones. Parishioners can still plug into the celebration of Mass, adult education sessions, or attend a meeting with an 800 number. In this way they can hear and verbally contribute.
- **Phone only session:** Popular interest in devotions such as praying the rosary has been growing in some communities. Once a week, have people call in to a special number where they could hear a parish staff member or parish volunteer who would greet them, and then say a rosary over the phone together.

- **Snail Mail:**
 - Periodic bulk mailing of an abridged Sunday bulletin can be helpful. A form letter personally addressed that includes a brief note at the bottom and signed from a member of the parish staff helps.
 - A personal note from parish staff. You could have each parish staff member, members of the Pastoral Council, or parish volunteers make a commitment to send five “thinking of you” personal notes each day.
 - Use the parish data system to send snail mail on birthdays or anniversary dates of parishioners. Organize a group of “stuck at home” parishioners to make handmade cards for parish staff to use for this purpose.
- **Outreach:** Organize your staff or a group of volunteers to call every household, or households with members over 75 years of age, in your parish. You should provide a basic script for the call, including asking what help parishioners would like. Collect the data from those calls to help develop a plan to serve those in need.

Have parish staff and parish volunteers call community programs, service organizations, government agencies, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, group homes, and food pantries to discuss ways that your parish can provide help and support during this crisis. Be certain to share those ideas with your parishioners.

- **Technology Access:** Keep in mind with all your communication planning that access to technology may not be available to all parishioners. Ensure you offer alternate options for parishioners to receive your messages. You could consider opening computer labs in your schools to parishioners without ready access technology (while practicing safe distancing and proper disinfecting), so that they can connect with loved ones, research food pantries, locate government and community services, job hunt, etc.

Available Resources on communication during our time together-apart:

[Resources for Families, Parishes and Dioceses During the COVID-19 Crisis from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)

[Resources for Catholics at Home During the COVID-19 Crisis from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)

[Parish Communication During COVID-19 from myParishApp](#)

[Communication with your church during COVID-19 from flocknote](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Church Planning Template from Humanitarian Disaster Institute](#)