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Always Connected

Planning for Fall 2020 -
PARISH LIFE AND MINISTRY

"The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. ...And you have to start from the ground up."

— Pope Francis

PARISH LIFE IN FALL 2020 SUMMARY

Introduction (page 3)

- Start with prayer, connect with staff and parishioners
- Seize the opportunity to focus on mission and set a new vision

Develop Strong Leadership (page 5)

- Form a Parish Leadership Team (PLT) around the pastor
- Clarify and evaluate the parish mission
- Recruit and empower parish leaders and catechists
- Evaluate needs and set goals with creativity and flexibility. Keep in mind the concerns and limitations that vulnerable parishioners may have during this time.

Focus on the Domestic Church (page 9)

- Remind married couples to spend time together and with God
- Empower and accompany parents to be primary catechists and witness to their family
- Help families build rhythms of prayer
- Offer pastoral care resources to families in need
- Help faithful families connect with each other

Invest in Small Group Ministry (page 10)

- Use the method of ministry Jesus did with your adults, youth, children and families
- Activate flexible small groups for year-round ministry (not only in Lent)
- Consider this pandemic-friendly way of ministry that fosters trust and deepens faith discussion
- Formation and accompaniment through small groups works for everyone from inquirers to missionary disciples

Other Considerations for Fall 2020 (page 11)

- Enhanced health measures
- Be aware of trauma
- Over communicate
- Stay connected

Introduction

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Before we talk about practical tips for parish life and ministry during this very unique time of Fall 2020, let us always remember that the parish is the place that people come together as the Body of Christ to be in the presence of our Lord. We must remember to keep prayer at the center of everything we do. If we're not careful, our parishes might feel more like businesses, rather than centers of faith, evangelization, and discipleship.

Let us now pause and place everything in prayer:

Pray for our parish leaders, that they would know how to best show the love of Christ at this time.

Pray for the sick and their families, that the Lord would heal and comfort them.

Pray for students and families, that the Lord would give them patience and discipline.

Pray for the unemployed, that God would provide through their families and community.

Pray for the vulnerable, that sickness would pass over them and they would rely on others for help.

Pray for healthcare workers, that the Lord would protect and strengthen them.

Pray for an end to this pandemic, that our Lord will guide the hands of our scientific community.

And we pray that all the people within our parish/archdiocesan boundaries will not succumb to fear, but come to experience the peace of Jesus Christ.

NOW, LET'S GET CONNECTED

Young people are connected to families. Families are connected to other families. By Baptism, we are all connected to the family of Christ. Pope Francis describes the Church as "family of families." We are all connected through the celebration of the Eucharist.

So ... how have parishes facilitated connections during this time of pandemic? How about the past few years? Is it working? What fruit have we seen? How do we need to be connected in the future? For example, the traditional classroom might not work effectively today for connecting everyone when it comes to passing on the faith. Use the current opportunity to connect adults, young people, and their families with the parish in creative, productive ways.

Parishes in the Archdiocese are taking a strong look at evangelization and asking, "*How can our parishes empower the faithful to become missionary disciples? How can we connect with the people we already serve and inspire them to reach out to a world in desperate need of the Gospel?*"

Parishes can best serve these connections when they rely on a leadership team so that the work does not fall to the Pastoral Associate or Pastor alone. Parishes can help connect families to Jesus Christ by building up the Domestic Church – the family, where the seeds of faith are first planted and holiness is cultivated and nurtured. Finally, parishes can connect parishioners and families together through small group ministry.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS ON MISSION

The Fall of 2020 is more than an opportunity to pass on the faith; it is a chance to help the young and old to fall in love with the person of Jesus Christ. Evangelization happens first. Catechesis follows.

As you plan for the fall, honestly consider whether what you have been doing for years is really working. Are you making disciples or just getting through your lessons? Are the families actively engaged with their faith or just dropping off the kids and checking the box? Are teens thriving as bold witnesses of the faith? Are adults growing closer to Christ or just living off the faith from their childhood? Are people returning after receiving sacraments?

It is easy to get frustrated and feel stuck. Let's take advantage of the opportunity offered by this moment in our lives and in our Church. Let us commit to thinking about how we can connect families to our parish, young people to the "first witnesses" of the faith in their homes, and, above all, how to connect all of us to the person of Jesus Christ.

Believing doesn't always lead to belonging. Let's work on connecting our folks to one another and to Jesus, so belonging can strengthen believing!

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A NEW VISION

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" - Proverbs 29:18

Parents are burdened by the demands of adjusting their work and home lives to an ever-changing set of public safety guidelines and requirements. Children miss seeing their classmates and teachers in person and are as fatigued by video conferencing as the rest of us. Adults miss the connectivity to their parish through small groups of faith formation and ministry. The fact is that we don't know when things will return to normal or what a "new normal" might look like.

What we do know is that we are tasked with passing on the mystery of faith (see General Catechetical Directory #47). We know, according to St. John Paul II, that catechesis is just a moment in the whole process of evangelization (see *Catechesi Tradendae* #18). We know the essential role the family plays in, first, evangelization and, then, catechesis, the handing on of the faith (see the Catechism of the Catholic Church 2221-2231).

Develop Strong Leadership

Parishes are the most important organizations in the world. If this is true, and we are convinced that it is, then the leadership of the pastor is critical. He is the leader, spiritually and organizationally. But he cannot run a parish alone.

Great pastors surround themselves with a team of leaders who participate in the responsibility of leading the parish, which we call the Parish Leadership Team (PLT).

The Parish Leadership Team helps the pastor align the parish to what's most important for its mission. A Parish Leadership Team exists to assist the pastor in leading the vision and priorities of the parish and bringing the rest of the staff, volunteers, councils and parishioners on board. This involves creating clarity of the mission of the parish and aligning the entire parish, staff, and ministries to that mission, which includes everything from strategic decisions and inspiring people to operations and finances.

The role of leadership team members is to look beyond their areas of expertise or responsibility in order to help the pastor protect the good of the entire parish. A pastor is a better leader when he surrounds himself with good leaders and opens himself to their input and influence.

Spend a week putting together a team to plan for the fall. No one is going anywhere right now. Take advantage of this opportunity. Don't rush in forming the team. Do it well. For tips on building a Parish Leadership Team, check out the Archdiocese website [here](#).

GETTING STARTED

1. Consider your mission first. Regardless of the pandemic and all that it brings to bear, what is your dream for the parish? What does it look like?
2. How is the parish helping evangelize adults, teens, children, and their families?
3. The coming fall has many unknowns. Be flexible and patient in your ministry so you can adapt quickly when/if change is necessary.
4. Do not start from scratch. Yes, things are different, but your parish and ministries had things in place before the pandemic. Use your successes as a starting point.
5. Be creative in trying new methods with ministries that may have caused frustration in the past.
6. If your parish's mission, goals, and objectives are not already clearly stated, be sure to clarify and document them for the staff and parish.
7. Give yourself permission to say no to some things you normally do in order to stay on mission.
8. Set a go/no go deadline for decisions.

ANSWER THE BIG QUESTIONS

- Where are we fulfilling the Church's mission to share the gospel and make disciples?
- Where are we not fulfilling the mission?
- What are the needs of your parish community? Which needs have the highest priority?
- How must your parish creatively meet those needs and stay on mission?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Is the mission of the parish to form disciples or are we just delivering content? Without forming relationships first, the good news can fall on deaf ears. How can we build a relationship with other staff members and all parishioners, as well with the wider community?
- Many people feel more isolated and disconnected during this time, and long to know that they are loved. How can our parish community respond creatively with the love of God to these needs?
- In light of this reality and our mission, what are your current goals?
 - With families?
 - With teens and young adults?
 - With volunteer leaders and catechists?
 - With adults?
 - With our vulnerable populations (those who are elderly, live alone, have limited technology, have disabilities, experience mental health challenges, are spiritually lost, etc.)?
 - With Catholics and others that are searching and want to discover/rediscovers the faith?
- What are the specific objectives that will help you accomplish each of your set goals?
- What are the parameters in which you must work? (Following CDC and local public health guidelines, working with parish space limitations, working with technological capabilities of parishioners and catechists, etc.)
- What strategies will you use to achieve your objectives? (*Examples*)
 - Recruit adults who are not involved to serve as parish ministry leaders.
 - Send postcards to every young person with the promise to pray for them on a specific day.
 - Use or create a parish phone tree to reach out to every parishioner on a regular basis.
 - Consider inviting parents to be formed alongside their children in sacramental prep.

PLAN FOR THE UNKNOWN

- What if you have lay leadership and catechists who do not feel comfortable returning?
- Have you recruited and trained enough lay leadership and catechists to start ministry?
- What if a child, teen, or adult contracts Covid-19 after a face-to-face gathering?
- What is your capacity for social distancing requirements for in-person ministry at the parish?
- How will you accompany families in sacramental prep while remaining flexible and pastoral?
- Have you provided an orientation for Zoom (or similar platform) for your catechists and small group leaders?
- Have you ordered supplies for cleaning and PPE?

CREATING FLEXIBLE PLANS

Ministry plans can take shape in a combination of various ways. Some examples are:

- In person, at the parish, socially distanced, within the limits set by the Governor or county
- In person in small groups at homes
- Within the domestic church (either as a single family or with a couple of families - see below)
- Small group ministry online (see below)
- Large group presentation online with small groups (online or in person)

This fall is an opportunity for partnership and collaboration with a neighboring parish, within your vicariate, or with other parishes throughout the Archdiocese.

Please note: Safety is an important consideration in making plans. Please keep in mind and respect the varying comfort levels of your parishioners and their families when implementing ministry plans.

Whenever possible, we don't recommend going completely remote, as it creates a disconnect among young people, their families, adults, and the parish. Let's also make sure to keep in mind that we want to lean on and empower the Domestic Church in new ways, remembering that parents are the primary catechists.

Jesus came in person and that is the model for our ministry, so we want to keep fostering relationships, hospitality, and community at the forefront of how we do ministry, even in this new way. See below for ideas on how to do this through small group ministry.

A CHANCE FOR CREATIVITY

Pope Francis, at the beginning of his Petrine ministry, recalled the importance of "creativity", meaning thereby "seeking new ways", that is "seeking how best to proclaim the Gospel" (The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community 1).

Change is always difficult, but this fall it will be inevitable. You can seize this opportunity, when change is expected, to think creatively and/or perhaps finally make real the dreams you have held onto in order to breathe new life into your ministry. Be bold, creative, and realistic.

A FEW CREATIVE IDEAS

- Use parish Zoom accounts to facilitate small group ministry (see further ideas below).
- Provide Sunday lectionary resources to help families celebrate the Sabbath and go deeper.
- Use videoconferencing to schedule regular check-ins with lay leaders and catechists, such as your RCIA team, parish councils, ministry core teams, etc.
- Include programs focused on the Kerygma, providing the opportunity for everyone to encounter or re-encounter the person of Jesus (*Evangelii Gaudium* #3) and strengthen their personal relationship with Him (parishes have used programs like the Search, Alpha, or Sycamore).
- Invite parishioners to share their faith journey (bulletin articles, in small groups, in families).
- Consider meeting in the gym, in the parish field, or in small groups on a porch.
- Invite parishioners to ask faith questions that the priest can answer in a weekly Zoom call.
- Flip the classroom. Offer the topic and give older children the chance to research and teach others.
- Have last year's catechists teach the final class to launch this year, giving the chance to say bye.
- Think outside of the classroom. Encourage families not to outsource their child's faith formation and to realize faith is not just another subject their child learns from someone else.
- Think about assigning catechists to families instead of classes. What would happen if catechists met on a regular basis with families to share faith, pray, break open Scripture, etc.?
- Send letters to families. Yes, letters! Not a form letter, but a good old-fashioned hand-written letter. Could you pair seniors with young people to write back and forth?
- Provide opportunities for families to serve together. Set up for Mass? Disinfect the church? Make lunch bags for the homeless? Train together to be liturgical ministers?
- Equip parents and grandparents to talk about life and faith with young people.
- Have regular Masses for all parish children in specific grades (both parish and public schools).

A FEW CLERGY-SPECIFIC IDEAS

- Pray with the various ministry leaders and check-in with teams on a regular basis.
- Share your own faith journey about how you encountered Christ prior to seminary and who accompanied you. Then, do a second recording of your discernment into the vocation of priesthood.
- Record practical teaching videos – for example, use your phone to video yourself getting vested for Mass and explain the vestments and the significance of each.
- Share how you pray and how to pray, the importance of your holy hour, morning/evening prayer ... and invite families to pray your office with you virtually.
- Video a tour of your parish, explaining the symbolism behind all the various sacred spaces and art.
- Share how you prepare for Reconciliation and the difference that makes in your life.
- Introduce Eucharistic Adoration and share your experience of spending time with the Lord.
- Include suggestions or challenge questions in your homily. Then ask lay leadership and catechists to use them as a discussion starter in their next gathering.
- Host a regular Zoom Q&A/Facebook Live for parishioners to reach out and connect.

For more on developing strong leadership, go to:
<https://evangelization.archdpdx.org/leadership-development>

Focus on the Domestic Church

“Family-centered catechetical programs are opportunities for parents to catechize their children directly, for spouses to catechize each other and for children to catechize one another and their parents” (National Directory for Catechesis #61.2).

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to confine thousands of parishioners to their homes, the question of how to strengthen family faith while separated from the sacraments and parish life has become increasingly prevalent. And, as parish leaders have stretched to minister to their congregations from afar, a recurring theme has been the meaning of the family unit within the Church.

The challenges brought on by the pandemic have compelled parish leaders to proclaim and support the centrality of the family, or the “domestic church,” more than ever before. In reality, the parish church exists to support the Christian life and ministerial efforts of the domestic church: the family.

God is giving us an opportunity to rediscover an idea that has been hidden in plain sight since the early Church. Namely, it’s the Catholic *home* — not the parish, the school, or archdiocesan Pastoral Center — that is meant to be the center of intentional discipleship and primary outpost of evangelization.

So, evangelize your parish through the family!

How do parishes help build domestic churches? Here are some ideas:

- Support married couples through renewing and strengthening their relationship.
 - Invite them to keep dating each other by spending quality time together.
 - Offer ways for them to pray together as a couple.
- Help families build a routine of prayer and Sabbath in their home.
 - Show families how to build a sacred space in the home.
 - Help them form a rhythm of daily prayer.
 - Encourage them to attend Sunday mass, and when not possible, give them a process to pray through a domestic liturgy.
- Remind parents of their role as the primary witnesses of the faith to their children. Find creative ways to empower and accompany them in this.
- Be aware of the many challenges families are facing due to the pandemic, including sickness, death, grief, depression, anxiety, marital conflict, and job loss among other things, and provide the necessary pastoral care and resources to them.
 - Serve as a compassionate ear.
 - Pray with them.
 - Refer parishioners to professionals when needed.
- Help families get connected with other faithful families.
 - Taking into account the varying restrictions and comfort levels, help parishioners connect family to family for prayer, faith formation, service projects, and comradery.

For more on focusing on the domestic church, go to:

<https://evangelization.archdpdx.org/family-life>

Invest in Small Group Ministry

ADULTS | YOUTH | FAMILIES | CHILDREN

When we're "trapped" at home, it can be tempting to binge-watch a favorite movie or TV series, or finally clean out that cluttered closet. While that isn't necessarily a bad way to spend a long weekend, it does seem like a waste when the weekend turns into a week or two, or more. All that downtime is a perfect opportunity to invest in your relationship with God. How can we encourage parishioners to sink deep roots in Christ during this season?

The best solution is to invest now in small group ministry. Even in our isolation, with minimal effort, parishioners can strengthen the foundation of the parish community in small groups. Technology has allowed us to meet together even if we aren't in the same space.

WHY SMALL GROUPS?

- Let's follow Jesus' example. This is the way He did most of his ministry.
- Small groups are perfect for this time of pandemic as we minimize exposure and maximize community. You can meet in person at a parishioner's home, at the parish, or virtually online.
- Small groups can serve as easy entry points to invite the disconnected or loosely connected to be more engaged.
- Current parishioners develop friendships faster and dive deeper more quickly in a small group setting.
- Having multiple small groups meeting at different times/on different days provides flexibility.
- Because of the intimacy of small groups, people notice when someone is missing.
- Accompaniment within small groups allows for the space and time that conversion often needs.
- Once small groups are established, they are easily replicated. Split the group in two and invite new members to join and empower new leaders at the same time.
- There are numerous quality Catholic plug-n-play digital resources to help guide leaders with the faith formation and discussion.
- Many small groups have both a social and spiritual component. The format followed often includes a time of welcome (sometimes with food), checking in, some faith formation, and then discussion. Jesus often met around a table – we can do the same!
- As relationships form, and challenges are brought to light, small groups can be a wonderful way to provide pastoral care and pray for another.

Though it may be counterintuitive, initially place more focus on the lived behaviors of discipleship. Help children and parents learn how to pray personally. Support them in reading Scripture by themselves. Draw upon the works of mercy to practically live out their faith in everyday life.

For more on focusing on investing in Small Group Ministry, go to:

<https://evangelization.archdpdx.org/small-groups>

Other Considerations for Fall 2020

Now that you have spent some serious time planning, let us offer some additional considerations. We know this is all overwhelming. Life has changed. Things are different. People everywhere are wearing masks. Grandparents haven't hugged their grandchildren in months. Play dates have been cancelled and family milestones like birthdays and graduations suddenly look much different. Now, imagine you are a child or teen dealing with all of this. Perspective helps.

ENHANCED HEALTH MEASURES

We need to ensure that we are well equipped to manage the enhanced health requirements that are necessary to protect against COVID-19 infection. This includes PPE and other equipment, supplies, social distancing protocols, and monitoring of health indicators required to protect our children, teachers, and staff. While we all continue to assess guidance to determine the specific protocols that will be implemented, we must also continue to work with our local Health Department on what those look like. Stay connected locally and with Archdiocesan Pastoral Staff.

BE AWARE OF TRAUMA

The pandemic has caused trauma that we can't even see yet. Many marriages and other relationships that were struggling before are worse off now. Students, teachers, and parents are all frustrated with the challenges of education in the 2020-2021 school year. Many have lost jobs or have reduced hours, which cause financial strain and stress. This is not to mention the sickness and death caused by the pandemic and the grief that accompanies it.

This situation requires us to have a thoughtful, compassionate, and flexible approach to ministry as we navigate the social emotional needs of ourselves and our community.

THE CHURCH INVITING US TO BE OPEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Our parish faith formation offerings have always existed to serve this end – to evangelize and catechize the family and offer everyone support to grow in faith and holiness. Yet the methods and strategies of the last few months and years were not designed to account for these times. We have an opportunity to embrace more fully Pope St. John Paul II's call for a New Evangelization – new in ardor, methods, and expressions (Address to CELAM, 9 March 1983) specifically in the context of the norms of parish life and elements of our formation programs.

Our goal is “to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today, who are buoyed up by hope but at the same time ... oppressed by fear and distress” (Pope St. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #1). We can show families how “the joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #1).

This means we may need to think very differently “so that the church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #27).

If, as Pope Benedict wrote, “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and decisive direction” (*Deus Caritas Est* #1), then let us now consider new ways in which we can embrace what Pope St. John Paul II called our “supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples” (*Redemptoris Missio* #3).

GOOD COMMUNICATION IS VITAL

As you look to Fall 2020, it’s vital to set clear expectations and instructions for the primary channels of outgoing and incoming communication. Good communication will provide everyone with a sense of stability, ease concerns, and lessen the likelihood of misinformation and unnecessary drama.

Now is great time to improve parish communications. If your staff is not blessed to have the skillset to be a graphics designer, a webmaster or to have the technological expertise to implement a texting app ... no problem. There are wonderful faithful Catholics that help get things set up. Look around at other parishes in our Archdiocese or look to the best of the 17,000 parishes in the United States. Find what works for your parish and adapt to your needs.

REMEMBER: ALWAYS CONNECTED

Take this opportunity to empower parish leaders to follow the leadership of the pastor, remaining focused on the mission of the Church. Consider how your parish is building up and supporting the Domestic Church, which we know will have lasting impacts on parish life and evangelization. And consider expanding small group based ministry whenever possible, which will lead to the formation of intentional disciples.

And remember the importance of connection -

- Parents to the parish
- Young people to their families
- Parents to their children
- Families to other families
- Young adults to young adults
- Seniors to seniors
- New parishioners to existing parishioners
- Inquirers to the Catholic Faith to parish disciples
- Parishioners to the vulnerable in the wider community
- Everyone to Christ