

Suggestions of Pastoral Initiatives during COVID-19*

*Some initiatives might be worth continuing after the pandemic.

Many parishes shared great ideas during the regional meetings for pastoral initiatives that took place in April 2020. In hopes of spreading some of this wisdom, here are a few suggestions of initiatives that were shared by parishes across the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface.

Communication

- Create a parish phone list. A volunteer ministry team could call parishioners on a regular basis to do a wellness check-in and pray with each person. (Every two weeks was one suggestion.)
 - o The Catholic Apostolate Center hosted a webinar entitled: [The Church on Call: Accompanying Parishioners through Phone Calls during Times of Separation.](#)
- Communication is essential for a parish to function well and to grow in community. Make use of email, of your website or of different social media platforms to reach the different demographics and those with different technological abilities.
 - o It is important to have regular communication. Determine the frequency that works best for your community. Parishioners should know when to expect updates on the website and to have some regularity of communication. For example, updates to the website are done every Friday or the 1st and 15th of every month, or even weekly emails are sent on Thursdays or Saturdays. Being consistent in communication is important. Weekly communication might be best for your community.
 - o [Flocknotes](#) and [Mail Chimp](#) can help you send email communications to large mailing lists without it being flagged as junk mail.
- Continue publishing a parish bulletin, but make sure it is accessible via electronic formats. It also helps to have a few printed copies available for pick up.

What to Communicate?

- Have the priest or a parishioner share a reflection on some of the readings of the week.
- Try to share about things that are not just COVID-19 related. Make use of the liturgical year as well as the current season.
- See if your parish can use community signs or billboards to share messages of hope.
- Fences and sidewalks can also be decorated to show that the Church community is alive and active.
- Send a blessing or prayer card from the parish to all members of the community for a special Feast Day. A person does not need to be a parishioner to receive messages of hope; this might be a time to consider evangelizing through joyful messages.

Parish Life Activities

- Consider having the church open during different times to accommodate the variety of schedules that parishioners may have. During the day, some parishioners may be working or have schoolwork to complete; offering one evening for people who are working during day may be appreciated. Communicate the hours when the church is open for personal prayer in a clear manner through the bulletin, website and other media.
- Organize a group of parish intercessors.

- Intentions can be sent in by email or called in. They are then shared with the group of intercessors to bring to prayer.
- Instead of in-person meetings or gatherings, try and set up online meetings.
 - From catechesis, to prayer groups, to adult faith formation, with a few modifications, strengthening community relationships and deepening an awareness for God can still take place.
 - No need to create new content. Resources are available at archsaintboniface.ca or do a quick search on the internet and send an interesting article to families. [Ascension Presents](#) on YouTube also has many videos that can lead to great discussions.
- Involve your parish groups in helping with special initiatives. The Knights of Columbus, Catholic Women's League, Couples for Christ, and others could help in connecting with parishioners or even organizing a food drive. [Winnipeg Harvest](#) has resources to organize a safe food drive.
 - When initiating efforts as a parish, look into other initiatives that are happening in your community and inform your parishioners of ways they can participate in these efforts. There may be opportunities to work together with other churches in your area.
- Create a local pilgrimage around your church and community. People can print off or have the reflections on their phone as they walk. If your local government permits it, you might even want to set up crosses or images along the way. Some of your parishioners may even be open to having it set up in their front yard.
- Be mindful of other current issues taking place around the world. For example, setting up a candle display to pray for the victims of the tragedy in Nova Scotia.
- Continue Parish Pastoral Council meetings in a safe way, online, over the phone, or hold shorter meetings while physical distancing. This might be a good time to start a project that requires more planning. These meetings also offer a time to pray together as parish leaders.
- Have the youth or the children create cards or artwork to share with the elderly in your community. They can easily take a picture and share it online or even drop it off at the parish office to be hung at the entrance or dropped off at a local retirement home.

Ways to Promote Physical Distancing When the Church Is Open

- Have the same number of spray bottle as the number of people permitted in the church at the same time. Ask people, through a sign or a greeter, that when they enter for some personal prayer time, they take a bottle and clean the area they will use before and after.
- Have people use a sticky note to mark where they have sat. This indicates which pews need to be cleaned.
- Use tape or string to block off some pews to encourage physical distancing.

Think Ahead

- Start thinking ahead to when you will be able to assemble as a larger community. People who had stepped away from the faith before the pandemic but found comfort in joining your community via the internet might want to grow their connection with the Church.
 - How will the parish reach and invite them?
 - How will your parish make them feel welcome and part of the community?
 - What parish activities will help them grow?
 - [Alpha](#)?
 - Sharing groups on the basics of faith? ([Catholic Christian Outreach](#) has resources available.)
 - Would they want to complete their initiation in the Church or have their children receive sacraments?