

Communication Plan for Parishes

Stage 1: Pre-Restrictions

1. Affirm the parish's communication structure:
 - a. Determine who is responsible for distributing all parish communications through email and social media. Be clear in these responsibilities so that all staff members know their role should they end up working remotely.
 - b. Create a calling tree so that the pastor, parish (and school) employees, volunteers and ministry heads can contact each other quickly
 - c. Create a digital copy of the parish & school directories and disseminate to staff by email
2. If you don't have one already, form a prayer committee who will be charged with receiving parishioner prayer requests and organizing prayer teams. Social media will be a key avenue for this.
3. Make sure that all recent parishioner information that came in via registration or household update forms makes its way into your parishioner database.
4. Double-check your communications systems (e-newsletter, social media, parish messaging app) so you can disseminate information quickly to all parish households. Write down any passwords or information you would need to access those systems from home.
5. Remind parishioners to like and follow your social media platforms and (if available) sign up to receive emails as this will be the quickest way to reach them with information in the next few weeks.
6. Determine what the parish can provide via video conference – religious education classes, prayer groups, rosaries, volunteer meetings, Mass, etc.
7. Look for volunteer opportunities and ministries that parishioners can take part in from home. Many families will be looking for opportunities to serve and minister. This could include writing cards, praying for special intentions, organizing materials for religious education projects, calling parishioners who live alone, etc.
8. Plan ahead to keep the parish active through prayer and support with the focus being on calling people closer to Christ. All challenges will pass.

Stage 2: As Restrictions Begin

1. Share important information:
 - a. Provide reassurance and communicate to parishioners exactly what the parish has done up to this point, and the steps that are being taken now
 - b. Provide concrete facts and reassure parishioners that authorities (civil and religious) are doing everything possible to provide for the safety of everyone
2. Communicate daily with your families through social media:
 - a. Provide guidance on actions parishioners should take to respond to quarantine (stay home from Mass, tune in to the livestream, support the parish online, join a prayer team)
 - b. Send prayers, scripture readings, and messages from your pastor
 - c. Provide links to Catholic resources such as Catholic News Agency, etc.
 - d. Share inspirational stories from the saints and historical anecdotes to put the current situation in perspective
 - e. Offer parishioners Facebook Live streams from the pastor or ministry heads that include scripture readings, rosaries, prayers, etc. Don't worry about making them professional – the key is to offer parishioners support, comfort and direction.
 - f. Remind parishioners that this is a time in which the parish needs their financial support to continue to minister
3. Answer questions quickly and clearly:
 - a. Determine who will monitor social media and email so that parishioner questions are answered in a timely manner
 - b. Address parishioner questions with concrete answers and, if applicable, specific actions they can take to help out
 - c. Be quick to redirect any comment threads that turn negative, and “hide” comments as appropriate to keep the parish channels positive and Christ-centered
4. Be empathetic. This is a challenging time and some parishioners are going to be hurting and worried. Be prepared for the emotions people express, such as anxiety, fear, anger or helplessness.
5. Show sympathy and support for parishioners:
 - a. If a parish family has fallen ill reach out to them via phone or email
 - b. Ask parishioners to email (rather than call) you the names to include in prayers for the sick. Post names and prayers on social media or website if you receive permission to do so.
6. Strengthen partnerships with key groups who work with your parish (local food pantry, lay apostolates, etc.) by communicating with them regularly and sharing information. The parish will have many people at home with time on their hands who are willing to volunteer if it's something that can be done remotely.

Stage 3: During Restrictions

1. Communicate early and often. Inform the parish about changes to Mass times, ministries and events. Err on the side of providing too much information too often rather than too little on an infrequent basis.
2. Communicate new initiatives, such as livestreaming Masses or rosaries. Make sure that every communication includes instructions on how to follow the parish on Facebook.
3. Ask parishioners to submit names of any family members who are ill, or any other special intentions through email. Route those names to a prayer group, or post on the parish Facebook page for prayer.

Stage 4: When Restrictions Lift

1. Explain to the parish that the crisis has ended:
 - a. Include specific messaging on updates to mass times, activities and events
 - b. Update parish website with informational updates
 - c. Explain any parish decisions regarding updates on all parish activities
2. Recommend important actions to get parishioners lives back to normal:
 - a. Promote Mass times, reconciliation times, adoration, etc.
 - b. Host post-Mass gatherings to return to normalcy (doughnut Sunday, pancake breakfast, etc.)
 - c. Offer thanks to parishioners and thanksgiving to God
3. Evaluate what worked well and keep doing it! Did you find your groove on social media? Develop a stronger prayer ministry? Engage new volunteers? Keep it going and don't lose that momentum!

Stage 5: Post-Quarantine

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of communication during the quarantine
2. Identify lessons learned, perhaps through a parish survey asking parishioner to describe or evaluate how they feel the parish staff communicated with them
3. Refine communications plans for future use

DEVELOPING YOUR KEY MESSAGES - WORKSHEET

Key Questions and Concerns	Your Answers / Key Points to Include in Your Message
<p>What is the current situation? What measures is the parish putting in place to keep parishioners safe and reduce risk?</p>	
<p>What specific information do you have to share? What details do you have about how the current situation is affecting the parish?</p>	
<p>What information needs to be shared regarding parish activity? What are all the ways that info can be shared – social media, email, phone calls, etc.?</p>	
<p>What can parishioners do to remain spiritually active during times of restricted movement?</p>	
<p>How can the clergy and employees of the parish engage people during this time? What tools are available? What volunteer and ministry opportunities can you create?</p>	