

WELCOME BACK PLAYBOOK

HOW PARISHES CAN WELCOME PEOPLE BACK TO MASS

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2021

INTRODUCTION

Welcoming parishioners and guests back to our parishes after quarantine is a key aspect of our commitment to being communities of joyful missionary disciples. We released a similar playbook some months ago when public Masses were reinstated on Memorial Day weekend. We have learned a lot since then, but what we have learned most clearly is that we can do this! We do not have to choose between safety and public Mass, between physical health and spiritual health, between being smart and being saints. Over these past six months, parishes all around the Archdiocese of Detroit have honed their practices and routines and are now ready to welcome all Catholics to return to Mass. This playbook — much of which is a reminder from that initial return to Mass — should help parishes be prepared for more people and more questions.

We will face many challenges, but we will also find unprecedented opportunities! As our Chief Shepherd has so frequently said, “God wants his world back.” This means that he wants to win over the heart, mind, and soul of every person in Southeast Michigan to the love of the Father made known to us in Jesus Christ. Each of us has a role to play in this victory which our loving God so earnestly desires.

Use this playbook as a way of strategizing and planning with your leadership team and those with whom you are engaged in ministry to think about how your parish can be a welcoming place. Even with certain health and safety protocols, physical distancing, and mandatory limits to the number of individuals who can be gathered, our missionary hearts can shine forth. Let’s pray for our guests, our returning parishioners, and everyone in our parishes that the spirit of apostolic boldness can flourish in this time and we can unleash the Gospel!

HOSPITALITY

The quarantine has left many people feeling lonely and disconnected. For many, the resumption of public Masses is welcome news! In order to make a smooth transition, it is important to clearly communicate directives with staff and volunteers as well as those who will be returning to church. While it is important to adhere to the capacity and social distancing guidelines, it is equally important to help people feel welcome and to get them connected or re-connected to parish life.

As the saying goes, you have only once chance to make a first impression. There will be a lot of excitement about coming back to Mass, but once people arrive, they may be taken aback at some of the restrictions that will need to be in place. Parishes have the opportunity to overcome any negativity or apprehension by exercising radical hospitality when people walk in the door. The following are some considerations for welcoming people back and creating an environment of radical hospitality

- Communicate clearly to your parishioners about the end of the general dispensation and the categories of individuals who remain dispensed because of particular circumstances. Find the most appropriate channels to share this, such as your parish's social media, website, bulletins, signs around your parish building, etc.
- Be ready for questions about whom the particular dispensations affect and why. and why. Make a small copy of the list of categories of individuals and make sure front-line staff and all volunteers have a copy.
- Consider using social media or doing a direct mail campaign to households in the parish boundary inviting them back to church, sharing about specific ministries that might be helpful to them during this time, and letting them know where they can find the most up to date information about your parish. You can also do a specific mailing targeting certain demographics such as teens, the elderly, families, etc. with specific invitations and offerings for each age group.
- Consider calling the elderly in your parish to explain the guidelines for the resumption of public Mass and reminding them to be wise and prudent about caring for their own health and safety as they return. All Catholics 65 years or older continue to be dispensed from their obligation to attend Sunday Mass. Alternatively, call all parishioners to welcome them back and collect their prayer intentions.

- Create a welcome video that invites people to your parish and directs them to a Frequently Asked Questions section of your website that answers questions about what they may expect when they return.
 - » This may include some of the [liturgical guidelines](#) published by the Archdiocese — especially the wearing of masks and the reception of Holy Communion — as well as any specific directives that will be implemented at your parish.
 - » It may be helpful to communicate to your parishioners specific directions for parking, directions for entering and exiting the building, and what will be available or unavailable during and after Mass, such as whether the parish office is open, the opportunity to talk to the priest after Mass, if the cry room is closed, etc.
 - » Post the video on your website and share the video via email and social media.

- Thoroughly review your website to ensure all content is up to date. Click on all hyperlinks to make sure they are not broken. Modify any content that needs to be updated due to programming changes or social distancing guidelines. Add new content regarding new formation opportunities, outreach opportunities, or ways parishioners can obtain help if they need it.

- Meet with the staff and volunteers who will be on the front lines of communication with your parishioners and guests via phone, email, or in person to ensure that they are exceptionally gracious and hospitable during this time. Ensure that they are clear on all the directives for the resumption of public Masses and provide them with a copy of the answers to the Frequently Asked Questions on the parish website.

- Create a special “Welcome Back” edition of the parish bulletin. Consider including the following:
 - » An article from the pastor which does the following:
 - Encourages parishioners to be patient during the transition and to allow the parish time to work out the kinks of celebrating Mass in a restricted environment, and
 - Exhorts them to do their part to help make the parish a welcoming environment for those who may be returning to church after a long absenceAny new opportunities for people to engage in parish life
 - » Any new opportunities for people to engage in parish life
 - » Testimonies of parishioners who have been coming to Mass over the summer and fall, demonstrating that it is safe

- Walk the grounds and tour the building of the parish as if you are a visitor. Signs can help people feel comfortable and know how to follow proper procedures. If your parish is funneling traffic through one door in order to limit capacity or closing off parts of the building, ensure that there are signs directing parishioners and guests appropriately.
- Consider having a visible place like a concierge desk during all liturgies to answer questions for guests before or after Mass. This should include any forms people may need to connect with the parish, like sacramental or registration forms. It should have a particular focus on welcoming newcomers and those who have been disconnected from the parish. It is important to collect contact information for those who are new and to follow up with them within one week to invite them back to Mass or to another activity.
- Create a sign that intentionally welcomes guests and visitors to the parish and directs them to the concierge desk.
- Ensure that there are enough staff and volunteers present at each liturgy to welcome and direct people as needed. It is important to be sensitive to the fact that people will be unaccustomed to the new environment and may need friendly guidance in the coming months. Ensure that guidance is given in a friendly and encouraging manner.
- Remind staff, ushers, and greeters to be friendly and greet people as they arrive. Here are a few things to consider for ushers and greeters:
 - » Smiling is especially important when wearing a mask.
Your eyes will show that you are smiling.
 - » Ensure that name tags are worn and are visible.
 - » Ensure that ushers and greeters model the social distancing rules and avoid handshakes and hugs.
 - » It may be tempting for ushers and greeters to chat and talk with each other after such a long time apart; however, the parishioners and guests should have the priority as they arrive.
- Consider providing free resources for those who are new or returning to the faith. Resources may include books, pamphlets, CDs, and information cards on how to connect to online resources for which the parish has a subscription, like [FORMED.org](https://www.formed.org). Resources can be placed in individual bags in order to limit person-to-person contact.

LITURGY AND SACRAMENTS

The Archdiocese of Detroit has published [specific guidelines](#) for resuming public Masses and these guidelines require strict adherence. The suggestions listed below are things that parishes may consider doing in addition to the guidelines.

- Parishes may consider incorporating a worship aid in their bulletin to allow a safe way to participate in the Mass without hymnals. This ensures a “one time” use in order to avoid contamination. Alternatively, parishes may consider using a projector and screen, or a QR code which links to hymns, readings, and announcements digitally.
- Because many liturgical ministers and ushers are older than 65 or may have compromised health, the parish may find itself in need of a fresh crop of volunteers for weekend liturgies. This is a prime opportunity to engage the youth. Parishes may consider recruiting and training confirmed teens who can serve in these roles during this time and beyond.
- Some larger churches have more capacity and could receive overflows. If your parish is regularly not able to seat all the faithful who present themselves for Mass, consider partnering with a parish who has excess capacity, like some of the churches in the City of Detroit).
- Discuss as a staff how you may consider the distribution of Holy Communion to those who are homebound.
- Have a generous availability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation while observing proper health and safety guidelines.

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING CAPACITY LIMITS

- Calculate the number of people that can be accommodated for liturgy based on the Archdiocese of Detroit guidelines and any overflow space your parish decides to use. Communicate that number to your parishioners so that they know and understand the limitations. When calculating the number, be sure to include all the people who are involved in the liturgy, such as your clergy, musicians, ushers, staff, etc.
- Each parish will need to review their plan to limit attendance and how to respond to parishioners once the reduced capacity is reached.

- » Consider having a designated “overflow” section in a second location once church capacity is reached. Plan for this second site to provide as reverent and beautiful an experience of the liturgy — with streaming of the Mass and reception of Holy Communion — as possible.

PRAYER

Prayer is the most powerful way our parish can be prepared for more people coming back to Mass. Engaging the whole parish community in prayer will not only unite the parish but will also help members be more docile to the movement of the Holy Spirit. With so many unknowns facing our communities in the future, prayer will help to keep us focused and faithful. The following are suggestions for prayer opportunities.

- As a staff, pray for protection for the parish during this time.
 - » You may use the prayer to [St. Michael the Archangel](#) to battle Spiritual Warfare, the [Prayer to the Holy Virgin of Guadalupe](#), or the [Prayer for Solidarity](#).
 - » Ask the Lord to place a “hedge of protection” around the parish grounds, the building, all staff, parishioners, and guests.
 - *“Lord, place a hedge of protection around our parish grounds, the church building, all of our parishioners, and those who will join us as we start to return to public worship. Keep in what is holy and is of you, and cast out what is not. We ask this in Jesus’ holy name. Amen.”*
 - » Publish the prayer you choose in your bulletin, post it on your website and social media, and invite your intercessory prayer team and your parishioners to join in these prayers of protection.
- Considered adding a petition to each Sunday Mass such as the following:
 - » For all parishioners and family members who are suffering with COVID-19 and those who have died from the virus
 - » For the swift development of a cure and vaccine for COVID-19
 - » For those parishioners who are not yet able to join us in person
- Provide regular times of Eucharistic Adoration. Invite parishioners to intercede for the parish and come to the Lord with their needs and concerns.
- Engage your intercessory prayer team to pray for all concerns during the time of transition to public worship and to listen to the Holy Spirit for any words or specific direction for the parish.

EVANGELIZATION & CATECHESIS

In the Spiritual Closeness Guideposts, [Archbishop Vigneron](#) writes: “Right now all of us, especially us pastors and our co-workers, are focused on responding to the coronavirus pandemic. But that doesn’t mean our work to “unleash the Gospel” has been abandoned. Quite the contrary. We still must be about evangelization. That’s always our mission. This is a providential time for us to witness to our sure confidence in Jesus as Lord of history, to manifest to the world that we face this challenge with unshakeable trust that the Lord will sustain us.”

Many of our most devoted parishioners have been back to Mass for months. Some have prudently stayed home for various reasons and are now returning. Others are not yet able to be back in person. People in our parishes will be at various stages of their “returning to Mass” in the weeks and months ahead. We need to be ready to respond to each of these categories of Christ’s faithful. Here are some ideas to engage newcomers and parishioners as we transition back to parish life.

- Provide a forum — online, small groups, etc. — for people who are returning to church or coming for the first time to ask questions. Consider having an online “open house” where staff can be available to answer questions and talk about what is coming up at the parish.
- Be intentional about following up with newcomers by phone and asking them about their needs. Connect them to pastoral care, emergency relief, or formation opportunities as appropriate.
- Consider doing an [online Alpha](#).
- Encourage your parishioners to [form small groups](#).
- Continue offering some digital formation and discipleship offerings.
- Offer a workshop on how to use technology to engage with the parish. This may be helpful to parishioners who are not technically savvy but want to be connected. You can use this as an opportunity to train people to use your parish app, Zoom, Facebook, or other technologies your parish uses.
- Host a family movie night where families are all encouraged to watch the same movie from their homes at the same time. Choose a movie on the life of a saint or a movie that promotes good values. You may choose a film that is available on [FORMED](#). Provide the link to the movie on the parish website or in the bulletin.

- Encourage parents and families to bring their faith into their homes, with resources like [52Sundays](#).
- Host a parish mission concentrating on liturgy, community, and the parish vision. Offer the opportunity for in-person participation — following the social distancing requirements — as well as an online option.
- Have a special mailing to people who are parishioners but do not regularly attend Mass letting them know you are praying for them, and invite them to engage with the parish. Consider doing this for specific age demographics, such as past Confirmation classes, letting them know of age-appropriate opportunities.

PASTORAL CARE & OUTREACH

The last several months have been extraordinarily difficult for many people. Parishes have a prime opportunity to bring the healing power of Christ into these circumstances. The following are some ways that parishes can be intentional about ministering to people in need.

- Provide [grief ministry](#) for those who have experienced loss during the pandemic. Many people are grieving the loss of their loved ones, whether due to COVID-19 or not. Some are grieving the loss of their jobs, others the loss of their homes, etc. Discern the needs of your community and provide resources as needed.
- Here are some suggestions for supporting those who have lost jobs:
 - » Host digital networking meetings to help people find job opportunities.
 - » Host an online job fair to connect parishioners who are employers with parishioners who are seeking work.
 - » Provide online workshops on things like improving your resume, how to use LinkedIn, Called and Gifted training, how to make a budget, managing finances, etc. Consider collaborating with other parishes to offer these workshops.
- Host opportunities for prayer ministry online or in small groups.
- Have a Healing Mass.
- Offer [crisis support](#) for those who have been struggling or suffering during this time.
- Connect those in material need with Christian service support, such as the [St. Vincent de Paul Society](#).

- Make sure all outreach materials are available in the languages spoken by those in your community.
- Provide an easy way for people to sign-up to request help online and/or in the parish office so that they can be directed to the best resources.
- Create a divorce support group that gathers weekly to help individuals with the process of healing and forgiveness.
- Reach out to the elderly and others who cannot return to the community right away. Provide continued help with their ongoing needs like purchasing groceries or helping with yard work. Young adults and teens with their families may be especially willing to help with this endeavor.
- [Host a blood drive](#) with safety measures from the American Red Cross.
- Organize and make known ways people can serve, either directly at the parish or through other Christian service opportunities. Provide easy ways to find the information and connect to the opportunities through the parish website, bulletin, social media channels, announcements, etc.

MIGHTY NETWORK

If you have additional ideas to share with other parishes or want to connect with others, join the [Encounter Grow Witness community](#) today!

SPARK KNOWLEDGE BASE OF IDEAS AND BEST PRACTICES

Visit [SPARK](#) for a comprehensive list of resources, best practices, and creative ideas for parish ministry.

PRAYER FOR AN END TO THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

Loving God, we come before you in our time of need. We lay before you our concerns and fears over the spread of the coronavirus. We know that you are mightier than all our fears and that the name of Jesus is the name above all other names. We ask, in the name of Jesus, that you stop the spread of the coronavirus. In your mercy, heal those who are sick and lead those who have died into your heavenly kingdom. We ask this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.