

## Getting Started in Non-Gathered Church

The following offers to those in parish leadership and collaborating with leadership a simple checklist as parishes begin adjusting to building up a community through non-gathered approaches. We appreciate some communities are well on the way.

### Step One: Prayer and Self-care

1. Keep or develop a routine of daily prayer, giving over worries and stresses to our God. This is also a time for quiet reflection, listening to self, and being aware of what surfaces for the community.
2. Personal Care: A daily self-check. Are you okay? Really? Reach out to others for help early and confide in someone you trust on a regular basis about how you are feeling and what is occupying your mind.
3. Identify Core Group: Identify the team who will journey with you. Leadership teams, parish pastoral councils, finance committees are all important, as are school and other community representatives. We can't do this alone. Who will be part of the journey? Consider people who share the vision, are prepared to have difficult conversations, that can be open and vulnerable and are proactive.
4. Meet with Core Group (online): Twice a week initially – to work through the next steps for your community. Ensure a time of reflective prayer and care for one another are key aspects of this group.

### Step Two: Clarifying your Vision

What do you want to achieve at this time with your community? People seek to be reassured. People are wanting connection. People need compassion. People need to hear and live the Good News of Jesus Christ, reaching out to those in need. What does that look like for your community? What are the key ways you want your community not only to survive but thrive during this time in its service of God's mission?

### Step Three: Preserve Privacy, Confidentiality, and Safeguarding Standards

In times such as these, preserving privacy, confidentiality and safeguarding standards is critical. There will be the need to ensure phone numbers and other contacts are not given too widely without appropriate permission, and details of people's personal situations are not freely shared, again without permission.

People are generally more vulnerable during this period. Empowering others to make contact, both the person making contact, and the one being ministered to, includes offering best practice. For instance, making contact should not become a counselling session. The caller needs to set limits on both time and the content of the call. It may also be considered intrusive, and again, appropriate permissions are critical, so this becomes a positive outreach and not an additional stress.

#### Step Four: Who requires immediate attention?

So many elements of the lives of your faith community have now been placed on hold. While the regular connections cannot take place physically, are there ways to check in via phone or online conferencing (e.g. zoom)?

Here is a checklist:

1. Those on the sick list
2. Those grieving a recent loss
3. Those in aged care or housebound – especially who have been receiving communion and visits
4. Those who frequent the presbytery or parish office for a chat, or who are around almost every Mass on the weekend
5. Those who are emotionally vulnerable.

Where possible, at least early on, try to have the person who normally connected make contact via phone around the time when they would visit or ask your core group to identify a team who could start ringing around to these people.

In these early stages we are asking:

- How they are doing?
- Is there anything we can help with?
- How can our community pray for you?

#### Step Five: Encourage ministries and groups to continue to connect

List all your groups and ministries. Cleaners, flower arrangers, readers, sacramental preparation parents, catechists, youth, community groups, social groups and so on. List them all.

In these early stages, we are simply reaching out and connecting. While broadcast messages will be sent, try to establish more personal connections.

Who is the main point of contact for each group? Empower them to reach out to others in their ministry group.

In these early stages we are asking:

- How they are doing?
- Is there anything we can help with?
- How can our community pray for you?

Because these are people who have been involved in a ministry or group, they may also have good ideas or ways to help. They may have already begun a great initiative. This is a good opportunity to listen to what is happening, affirm ideas, and feedback to the core group.

They may also be aware of people who may not be on the parish list. Ask them to seek permission from these people so they can be added to contact lists.

#### Step Six: Identifying and managing your Communication Channels

Ensure your communication channels are as up to date as possible.

It is a good time to ask people, as above, to help with gathering additional contact details, respecting privacy standards.

Since groups may start wanting to communicate via online videoing or teleconferences, it will be important to source “How To” handouts, both in how to use various channels, but also best practice in conducting meetings online and via teleconferencing.

How to guides will also be important for “training the trainer” to enable people to minister to those they know who may not be “tech savvy”. They may also need assistance to help them set up and read an email, join Facebook, or begin online videoing or streaming a Mass.

### Step Seven: Initial Messages to Share

1. A pastoral letter to your parish via email and video is a great start. Elements to include are:
  - Your vision (see step two), about where we are, how we called to care for one another, and positive ways forward.
  - Reiterating what can’t happen (e.g. Mass, groups, visits to aged care). People want to be reassured that they are not spiritually in the wrong if they are not receiving communion.
  - Sharing what is already happening. We have a core group who have been praying together. We are outreaching to those who are sick and grieving, to those who are on our visitation list for communion. We are in touch with our ministry groups to see how people are travelling.
  - If ready - Explain what the Sunday Worship Space will look like.
  - If ready - Explain what other spiritual supports are available.
  - Offer support.
  - Invite people to share their gifts and ideas.
  - Encourage people to keep connecting others, building up contact names/numbers/emails.
  - Explain ways we will stay connected.
2. The Sunday bulletin now becomes a vehicle for all is happening. Much of the bulletin can remain intact with ministry groups perhaps posting when they will be catching up via teleconference or videoing.
3. Facebook and website are important to keep updated. One approach could be daily to offer three updates:
  - a. A spiritual reflection
  - b. An update on what is happening – including some good news
  - c. A reminder of support services available

### Step Eight: Planning Ahead

It is important for normal advisory committees to continue, so schedule meetings for main groups such as: Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Finance Committee, Liturgy Group, Social Justice Group.

In our next update, we will explore how to develop virtual small groups in your community, and a weekly roster of activities.

### Help is Available

Our Pastoral Planning Office stands ready to assist. Please contact us if you require any support or if you have some great ideas you want us to share with others.

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