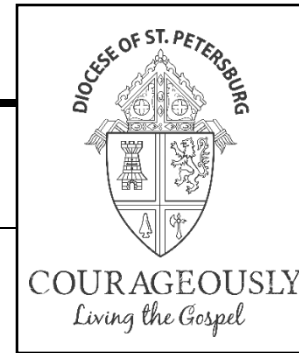

IDEAS AND BEST PRACTICES

Office of Stewardship and Development



Things seem to be shifting so quickly it is difficult to know what is coming, even in the next hour. In Scripture we are told, “Be Not Afraid” more than 365 times! Now is the time to show what our faith means to us, even if we are not gathering for weekly Mass. This should be a time for us to shine as ministers to our people.

We must reach out to our people and show them we are here for them. They need support, and we want them to come to their Church for care, for compassion and for a deeper relationship with Christ. This may mean learning new software and technology so that virtual meetings, resources, materials and opportunities for contact can be offered.

We know that in addition to needing us in times of crisis, our people feel the need to give where they can, in ways that they can. Our parishioners have come through time after time. We believe that if we start by ministering and serving, in Christ's name, we can weather this storm thanks to the proven generosity they have shown.

Our private Stewardship and Development resource page

[\(https://www.dosp.org/resourcesforparishes/\)](https://www.dosp.org/resourcesforparishes/) is up and running, and we will be updating it regularly as requests come in. Our staff is here and available to walk you through implementing any of the ideas presented. To request assistance or discuss any of the materials, please call our office at 727-344-1611 or email Meegan Wright, Executive Director, at mlw@dosp.org.

Below are some ideas, food for thought, and best practices to keep in mind as you work on your messaging and adapting your outreach efforts:

1) Initiate personal contact and continue to communicate with your parishioners.

Start with a phone call.

The sound of another voice right now can be a lifeline. Work with staff and volunteers who can help you contact every parish family within one week, especially your seniors who may be feeling isolated and fearful. Start first with service – do they need prayer? Medicine? Supplies? Food? Do they know how to access Mass online? Do they need help connecting through virtual methods?

Use this conversation as an opportunity to update information and find out how each parishioner wishes to be communicated with. Collect emails, cell phones, addresses. Find out what time they like to be called. Follow-up and plan now to call or have contact with all parishioners 65 and older at least once per week while we are all focused on social distancing.

You can access a sample phone script on our parish resource page at <https://www.dosp.org/resourcesforparishes/>.

Use what you have – your bulletin and your web page.

All practicing Catholics are familiar with the parish bulletin. Adapt your bulletin to an e-version and send it out to all the parishioners you have email addresses for and make it available online. Include information about live and recorded Masses, let them know you are praying for them, ask them to pray for you.

In the same manner, it is time to update your web page with resources, materials, prayer petitions, community boards. Maybe start a video blog – it isn't hard and in fact, there are thousands of groups creating excellent materials and making them available on line. For example, Church Development offered a video script from a pastor on a free blog at <https://www.church-development.com/blog/coronavirus-and-the-church-a-pastoral-response>. Once the video is recorded, we can work with you to embed it on your home page, or you can upload to YouTube or Vimeo.

Ask your parishioners for photographs of their activities and to share funny stories or ideas of how they are successfully making adjustments such as: adapting to virtual classrooms, gardening adventures or neighborhood walking scavenger hunts. Make your parish website the place parishioners go to find out how to get help and find out how they can help others in the community.

Try to connect your people through social media.

If your parish has social media outlets, use them. From experience I have spent hours searching my social network for a ray of light instead of more bad news. Prayer chains, announcements of the Pope and Bishop Parkes asking Catholics to pray the Rosary at specific times on specific days, and much more have helped keep my spirit alive. Try to tie into that.

And if your parish doesn't have Facebook, Instagram, etc., or doesn't feel like they are ready to take on social media at this time, utilize what is already available through the Communication Office of the Pastoral Center. Ask your parishioners to follow or connect with the following:

- Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/DioStPete/>
- Twitter –
 - Bishop Gregory Parkes: <https://twitter.com/BishopParkes>
 - Diocese of St. Petersburg: <https://twitter.com/DioStPete>
- Instagram:
 - Bishop Gregory Parkes: <https://www.instagram.com/bishopparkes/>
 - Diocese of St. Petersburg: <https://www.instagram.com/diostpete/>
- Tune into Spirit FM at 90.5, and connect with them online at <http://www.myspiritfm.com/>

These are fantastic resources that you can pass on by sharing, and you don't have to recreate the wheel. If you need more, our diocesan Communications Office has additional

communication tools and resources available at <https://www.dosp.org/communications/resources-2/>.

Engage your Finance Council and look at your budget realistically.

The reality is that even with creative asking, some of our families are already experiencing financial hardships due to businesses closing. They will not have anything they can give and if they cannot give, our revenue goes down.

Get your Finance Council together for a virtual meeting to look at cash flow for the next three to six months. You have to know where you stand before asking people for money. You have to make adjustments now. How much is needed to cover basic expenses? Can you implement cost-cutting measures such as shutting down the electricity, air conditioning and HVAC systems to all parts of the parish campus that are not being used?

*Make a list of all the services that **can** be offered.*

The question becomes, what can we offer? We must be offering services before we ask for financial support. Take time to brainstorm and come up with feasible, realistic ideas and who will be responsible for maintaining them. Below are some ideas to think about:

- Are there opportunities for virtual prayer groups?
- Are any members of your Finance Council and/or other members of your parish who are qualified, able to help other parishioners with personal budgets in this time when people feel financially vulnerable? This would be a wonderful resource and service to offer to your people at no cost.
- Can religious education classes and formation be offered virtually?
- Walking outdoors in open spaces is considered safe, and parishes don't have a lot of visitors right now. Is it possible to offer your parish grounds to seniors looking for a safe place to get out and exercise? Are you able to offer them water if they bring a water bottle with them?
- Is it safe to offer adoration in the church adhering to social distancing guidelines? If not, is this something that can be offered virtually?
- Can you organize telephone prayer lines with volunteers so people can be connect and pray with someone else?
- Is it possible to organize additional volunteers who can call to check on families known to be having a hard time?
- Can healthy individuals sign up to make deliveries? This means establishing a list of "on call" parishioners that can rotate and complete errands for those in need.

2) Once you show them we are still serving, ask through key messaging – mailed letter, e-mail, social posts.

The Office of Stewardship and Development has prepared samples of all of these on our resource page. But please...

Do not start your ask with panic.

If you start with “we can’t keep our doors open” you have missed a step. A large group of my friends have already been laid off. They literally have nothing to give, and when they see that message, they now feel guilt. Keeping our doors open isn’t what we are here for. We are here to bring people to Christ.

Always start with thank you.

Thank your people for what they have done in the past – it has enabled you to get to where you are as a parish family today.

Make it easy for them to give.

Not all people are affected the same financially and if they can give, we want them to be able to easily. Online giving, social media links and direct mailings can do this once the message is established. Did you know:

- Baby Boomer generation is most inspired to give by email messages (33%)
- Baby Boomer donors worldwide prefer to give online (54%)
- Fastest growing demographic for text-to-give: Women 45-60yrs.
- Globally, donors of all sizes prefer to give online worldwide:
 - 49% of Micro-Donors (<\$100)
 - 57% of Small Donors (\$101-\$1,000)
 - 55% of Mid-Size Donors (\$1,001-\$10,000)
 - 45% of Major Donors (\$10,000<)

Do you have online giving?

- *If your answer is no*, we have set up online giving for you at no cost for the next few months at <https://www.dosp.org/stewardship/supporting-your-parish/> and will mail a check and a detail list of donors to your parish on a weekly basis. All we need to do now is work with you to get the word out. We can help facilitate promotion on your home page, communication via mail and email so you can reach out to your parishioners to let them know support is not just appreciated, it is vital to the health and stability of the parish itself even if the doors are closed on Sunday.
- *If you do have online giving*, how many e-givers do you have? If it isn’t 100% it isn’t enough right now. Consider emails and direct mails to let them know how to sign up, or to initiate payments from their bank. We have established a landing page on the diocesan website to connect your people back to your online giving page. Once parishioners land on your home page, you have to ask, “how easy is it for new donors to find our online giving link?”

How else can people give?

- Mail - Right now, 25% are most comfortable giving by check, so consider including a return envelope with your mailing. If you receive a gift by mail, then respond with a thank you note and include a return envelope. We have included a sample thank you note on our resource page at [dosp.org/resourcesforparishes](https://www.dosp.org/resourcesforparishes).
- Phone - The most radical concept is to prepare to receive a gift by phone. Please prepare your office staff to walk a member through the process of making a gift while

on the phone. Ideally your website is ready to receive the gift, but some people may be hesitant to take the leap. A church staff member could guide them through the process.

- Drop Box at Parish – Is there a possibility of offering a secured, locked drop box, either through a door slot in the parish office, or right outside the main doors of the parish office? If yes, make plans to publicize and let your people know the box will be sanitized regularly, allowing parishioners to get out of the house but adhere to social distancing guidelines.

How about gifts other than money?

There is more than one way to give. On our diocesan website, we have established a universal “How to help others” page. It has links to not only to the “Support Your Parish” page and our brand new prayer site previously mentioned, but also to our Catholic Charities and to St. Vincent de Paul collecting items for shelters and families in need.

Some of the ideas listed above in section 1 call for the organization of volunteers right now. As this continues, though, the brainstorming exercise as to what services your parish can offer or is able to facilitate should continue regularly. How can we help our people connect to different ways they can give?

- Does your food pantry or local shelters need supplies? Provide a list of what is needed.
- Do nearby nursing homes need uplifting messages and phone call volunteers to keep their residents hopeful? Connect your people to local facilities so they can make a difference in the lives of others.
- Can you set up a local prayer chain? Again, if your people can email in their prayer request, it can be forwarded easily to another parishioner “on call.” If not, please add our new diocesan prayer page (courageouslypraying.org) to your site so we can help in this.

Again, we know this adjustment is daunting, and our staff has prepared sample letters, phone scripts, video scripts, social media posts, news posts and more to assist with all of this. We also are here and available to walk you through implementing any of the above. Please do not hesitate to contact us at 727-344-1611 to begin the discussion.