

## Hospitality during a Pandemic

### Starting Questions

- Why do we want people to return?
  - Is it so that tithing will go up again?
  - So that we can have the sociological reality of community?
  - Are we really happy that we're returning, or are we just getting something done?
  - Do we want them to return to keep us alive, a kind of spiritual vampirism?
  - Or, do we want them to have Jesus, to draw closer to Him?
- If parishioners have to sign up for a particular Mass, how will we welcome visitors (those who did not sign up because they aren't receiving our communications)?
- How do we turn people away without them feeling rejected? Is there a way to avoid this altogether?
- How can we connect people to the larger church community?
- How do we overcome the fear that the "other" poses a threat to my health, and that I am a threat to them?
- How do we make everyone feel welcomed and valued while still keeping everyone safe?
- How do we provide a pleasant experience of the liturgy?

### Ways to Be Hospitable

- **Avoid turning people away at all costs**
  - The worst-case scenario is someone leaving empty and rejected
  - If someone has to be turned away (which we can make very rare with the right preparation), give them something, an option, an opportunity to connect
    - A postcard w/ other Mass times, parish ministries, ways to connect online
  - What will you do if the church is full? Have a plan in place!
    - See below for "Ways to Include a Greater Number of People"
  - If you anticipate a full church, you might have all doors locked but one so you can count how many enter
    - Make sure this doesn't create any fire code issues
    - Have people line up outside in an orderly and socially-distanced fashion so they don't bunch up together around the one entrance
- **Effective and comprehensive communication is vitally important**
  - Do a mailing as well as Flocknote, email, social, website in order to reach people who don't have computers, internet, or smartphones (the elderly, the poor, etc.)
  - State things as simply and plainly as possible
  - Create a postcard, pamphlet, or infographic outlining expectations and precautions in a friendly way
    - Mail it out, have ushers hand it out, put it in every pew, on social, website

- Infographic from St. Patrick's: <http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Infographic-for-Returning.jpg>
  - 2nd Sample Infographic: <http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Infographic2.jpg>
- A video from the Pastor and staff would be helpful
  - Review the dates, times, precautions you will take, maybe also including a tour of the worship space and how things will be different
  - [Show video from St. Alphonsus Church: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=246736403213864>]
    - Pros:
      - Special Mass for the elderly
      - Professional presentation
      - Clean and clear instructions
      - Providing hand sanitizer and masks
    - Cons:
      - Tone from the pastor isn't great: "This is challenging, important that you cooperate with us, follow the protocol"
      - Caution tape!
      - "Please leave immediately"
      - How are they determining who goes to each Mass time?
- Or, you could get the worship space ready, take a pic, and send that out so that people know what to expect *visually* when they arrive
- Tone for everything should be welcoming, excited, hopeful, and empathetic
  - If your people hear "anxiety" in your communication, like all the precautions are a hindrance/burden, then they won't feel welcome
- Establish how you will respond to visitors/new people/"wrong" people and make sure that is communicated to everyone
  - Parishioners need to know this as well as the ushers
  - *Let's have **everyone** ready to welcome the stranger!*
- After you send out your plan in the mail and online, follow up with phone calls
  - Either with every family, or certain populations that you think will struggle with accepting this new way of doing things
  - This shows your willingness to get personal and to accompany people
  - Reassure your people that everything will be ok
- If we communicate clearly and effectively – and to everyone – then we can manage expectations and people are less likely to be rejected or tuned off by the precautions in place
  - For example, in Denver, they're calling them "Limited Public Masses"
  - This sets the expectation from the beginning

- [Show Denver Catholic website: <https://denvercatholic.org/guidelines-for-returning-to-limited-public-masses/>]
  - Don't present your plan as the final say
    - This could change, this is new for everyone, we'll adapt as we go
    - Welcome the input and suggestions of everyone for how to improve
    - Ask for mercy and patience, and extend mercy and patience
  - Provide an easy way to make suggestions (Google Form, email, text, etc.)
  - Send out a survey after the first weekend to get a better sense of what went well and what didn't
- **Ushers/greeters/volunteers are essential to creating the right experience**
  - Answering questions, helping people find appropriate places, gently asking someone to move over, gently reminding people of space between others, etc.
  - If they don't know how to be personal, welcoming, and hospitable, then they either need to get trained up, or they can't perform this role anymore
  - Make this a racially diverse, multigenerational group so that *everyone* feels welcome (people of color, teenagers, young adults, men, elderly, etc.)
  - Have them stationed both outside and inside the church
  - Their first words should be, "Welcome! I'm glad you're here!" *not* "You can't come in without a mask"
  - After Mass, thank people for coming, express hope to see them again soon
  - Coordinate their outward appearance
    - Cloth masks are more welcoming than hospital ones
    - Could the mask have a smiley face, parish logo, or a pleasant color?
    - If all ushers are wearing the same color of mask or shirt, then people know who to turn to for help
  - Smile with your mask on!
    - A smile is just as much in the eyes as in the mouth
      - Your eyes will squint a little when you smile
      - Widen them to show you are listening
    - You can't shake hands, but you can nod, bow, wave, listen intently
    - You can greet people with kind words
  - Have an on-site training with your ushers, greeters, volunteers before the first public Masses to make sure they all know the plan and are on the same page
- **Make room for visitors**
  - Most people who are new to the parish don't want to be fussed with, so we don't have to overdo it
  - They don't need a special, reserved section at the front of the church
  - But, we do want them to know that they are welcome and we have room for them

- Have your regulars fill up the choir loft and cry room first so that we save room for visitors in the main seating areas
- Makes your online reservations for less than capacity (80%)
- **Provide protective items, if you can**
  - Masks, hand sanitizer, wipes, gloves
  - Ushers could hand these out, or you could have sanitizing stations
  - Your ability to do this will depend on budget and what's available
    - Maybe a call could go out for people to donate what extra they have
    - Your crafty parishioners could start making face masks now
  - You might even decide not to start offering public Masses on the 25<sup>th</sup> if you aren't ready to provide this
- **There WILL be families**
  - Let's be patient and merciful with one another
  - For the last two months, families have been watching the Mass in their living room, with pajamas on and the cat running around
  - It's not going to be easy for them to transition back to structure and quiet
    - If a toddler leans over and picks up your keys, don't gasp in horror or slap his hand, just say, "thank you" and clean them off when you leave (with the Clorox wipes at the door, or with what you have in your car/purse)
  - It's up to each family to decide if ready for what Mass will require of them
  - It's not up to us to judge them for being there
  - Encourage parents to accompany children to the restroom to ensure they wash their hands and maintain social distancing
- **Liturgical considerations**
  - Try not to disrupt the liturgy too much with announcements about what to do
    - Prepare people well beforehand and then make an announcement right before Mass starts. Info also available in the pews.
  - The Sign of Peace doesn't necessarily have to be eliminated, just changed
    - Instead of a handshake, you could do a wave and a nod, or at least just look at your neighbor and say "Peace be with you!"
    - Then we are still acknowledging the presence and dignity of people!
  - During the Petitions, make them personal, pray for members by name, for local businesses, non-profits, and causes
  - Be mindful of moments when people naturally bunch up together (entering and exiting, receiving Communion, etc.)
- **How things look, smell, sound, *feel like* is very important**
  - Does the church smell like incense/flowers, or disinfectant?
  - Use softly-colored ribbon instead of caution tape to block off pews/areas
  - Avoid "STOP" signs or "Don't go here!" signs in all caps – we don't want Mass to feel like waiting in line at the DMV

- Sometimes a person is better than a sign
- Is the worship space at a comfortable temperature?
- For other spaces, like a parish hall or cafeteria, do everything you can to make it feel like church, so that the people who have to worship there don't feel slighted
  - Add candles, icons, statues, flowers, a crucifix
  - Make sure seating is professional and neatly arranged
  - Make sure the livestream is easily seen and heard
  - Designate ushers and EM's for these spaces
- **Other suggestions**
  - Set up a welcoming table outside the church with information about the parish, what the Mass times are, how to get involved, and what the procedures and expectations are for Mass, how to connect online
  - Put up "Welcome Back" signs around campus
  - Could also use sidewalk chalk to decorate your campus with uplifting messages and drawings

### **Ways to Accommodate a Greater Number of People**

- A large outdoor space could accommodate everyone
- Live-stream to other spaces on your campus (parish hall, school cafeteria, etc.) with their own greeters and ushers who will distribute communion
- The lifting of the Sunday obligation allows the parish to spread everyone out over the weekday Masses, instead of trying to have everyone on the weekend
  - Assign people to weekday as well as weekend Masses
  - Provide an evening Mass on weekdays for those who work
  - Make sure we put as much energy/resources into the daily Mass as we do the weekend Mass (liturgy, song, decoration, etc.)
- You might ask those who go every day to limit themselves to 1 or 2 Masses in a week in order to make room for others (if you see that room is an issue on weekdays)
- Using priests from local religious orders could help you offer more Masses
- Assign a Mass time just for the elderly/vulnerable populations, with more stringent safety measures (farther apart, less people, pre-registration required, etc.)
- If Mass is full, people could wait in their car and watch the livestream on their phone or listen on the radio, and then when it's time Eucharistic Ministers could bring the Eucharist to their cars
  - Hand these people a postcard with the web address for livestream or the radio station ID

### **Reservations and Scheduling**

- **Initial Thoughts**
  - There is no perfect way to do this

- Weigh the pros and cons and choose what works best for you
- Like I said before, if you over-communicate then you can manage expectations and reduce the likelihood of surprising people or having to turn people away
- Be prepared to take reservations over the phone and from people who walk in, as well as online
- Schedule Masses far enough apart that you'll have time for the cleaning crew to disinfect everything
- **First Come, First Serve**
  - It may be tempting to welcome people on a first come, first serve basis, instead of addressing the complications of reservations and scheduling
  - But, remember the paralytic at Bethesda (Jn 5:2-9)
    - He could not get to the pool because others kept going in front of him
  - First come, first serve seems egalitarian, but it's not
    - You'll have younger people running ahead of older people, people getting there an hour early so they can park close to the door, people rushing towards the door and creating chaos
  - It also creates anxiety over whether or not each person will get in when he/she arrives
- **Ticketing**
  - Makes the Mass feel transactional, exclusive, only for people who have earned the right to be there
  - Would allow you to record who was there, in case you need to do contact tracing
    - But, is it your job to track who gets sick? That's for you to decide.
    - We could avoid this job by strongly encouraging everyone with symptoms or in contact with someone with symptoms to stay home
  - How will you respond to visitors who don't have a ticket, or who arrive with a ticket but the church is full?
  - A "softer" version of ticketing could be to have people sign up online for the Mass they want to attend, but they don't bring a ticket to get in
    - Instead, you just trust that people will go to the Mass they signed up for
    - You use the reservation as a way to gauge numbers, then you turn off reservations for a particular Mass time once it reaches a threshold.
- **Alphabetical**
  - Designate a section of the alphabet to each Mass, and go by last name
  - This way every knows they WILL get to go, at their appointed Mass
  - This method, like others, can't account for everyone, since your list will be based on registered parishioners. For example
    - People who haven't registered at the parish
    - People who are new to the area
    - People who are registered at a different parish but want to come to you

- People who are non-Catholic
- When you are establishing the letter ranges (“Do we do A-C or A-E?”) be sure to still leave space for visitors
- Could rotate the letter ranges through the different Mass times, so that no one has the same time every week
- Or, keep them the same every week, with the understanding that if you absolutely have to go at a different time, there will be room for you
- BUT, try your best to go to the Mass assigned to you

### **Final Thoughts**

- Your people may need to know that they don’t have to receive every time they go to Mass
  - They aren’t obligated to but for once a year.
- Just because public Masses are allowed to resume on May 25, that doesn’t mean your parish has to start then.
  - You start when you’re ready, even if it’s after the 25<sup>th</sup>.
- If you are having trouble getting buy-in from people on intentional hospitality, then that probably means you need to take a hard look at the culture at your parish
  - We don’t have time here to address culture change, but if that’s what you need, I highly suggest a book by Deacon Keith Strohm called *Ablaze: 5 Essential Paradigm Shifts for Parish Renewal*
- Since people won’t be returning all at once, we still have to focus on engaging people while they’re away
  - There are large segments of your population that aren’t being served even by the resumption of public Masses
  - Continue to be creative and evangelize!
- Only through prayer will this endeavor be successful
  - Pray for our bishops, priests, and pastoral leaders who are grappling with how to accommodate people when they return
  - Pray for yourself and your fellow parishioners, that they will be able to embrace obedience, patience, and mercy
  - Pray for your visitors and any new people, that they find Jesus where you are
  - Designate prayer teams who’s sole job will be to storm heaven during the lead up to the first weekend of Masses and all during that weekend
- We can do this as long as we:
  - think it through,
  - make hospitality a priority,
  - work together, and
  - make prayer a priority!