**Community Accompaniment During COVID-19**

During this unprecedented time, we as the Church in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois want to make sure that our most vulnerable community members are not being forgotten. Many parishes are already reaching out to their vulnerable parishioners, those over 65 years old, those that are chronically ill, and those that have a disability, and we are most grateful for your efforts. For parishes that have not yet begun outreach efforts, if you are able, please do so in whatever manner is available to you (phone, email, U.S. mail). This is a time in which we can reach out to the elderly and isolated to offer encouragement, to pray with them and to listen to them. It is also a wonderful opportunity to build community and strengthen relationships in this time of “shelter in place” and social distancing. We may be physically distanced but we can still be socially close.

We suggest the following steps to organize your own parish-based outreach:

1. Identify a lead or co-leads for your parish who can coordinate the effort.
2. Contact individuals or groups who would be especially gifted with making phone calls to your community’s most vulnerable members. Ministers of care, social ministry leaders, prayer groups, youth and young adult leaders, Knights of Columbus, St. Vincent de Paul Society members would all be excellent groups to mobilize.
3. Identify individuals in your community that are over the age of 65, chronically ill, parishioners with a disability, or others that may be especially vulnerable during this pandemic. Your list of registered parishioners can assist with this, as can the members of your ministries that have relationships in the community.
4. Once your volunteers are identified, organize a training by phone or videoconference that communicates who will be contacted, how to conduct a pastoral phone call, and how information will be documented.

Fr. Wayne Watts, pastor of Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier, Archdiocese of Chicago, has generously shared resources his parish created, including a sample phone script, a sample letter to parishioners and instructions to parish volunteers who have assisted with making calls. Those resources are included within this document. We encourage you to adapt these resources to your own community context. Fr Watts mobilized a group of nearly 50 volunteers in their parish to make calls to the elderly and vulnerable. Thanks to their efforts, nearly 1,000 people were contacted within a 72- hour period!

We realize that not all parishes have the capacity or volunteers to facilitate a large-scale outreach effort as outlined above. Our team at the Pastoral Center is eager to assist any community that may require assistance with getting started. Please contact us at plasm@dio.org if you would like additional support at this time.

**Sample Letter to Volunteers**

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for giving your time and talent during this challenging time for our world and vulnerable parishioners. I not only want to thank you but let you know that I am here for you too. These can be scary times. But we have each other and we have God! I am just a phone call or text away if you need anything. Remember to take care of yourselves as well. Being isolated is a difficult thing for us as humans; we are indeed social beings. Stay connected with each other and let people know how you are feeling. Together we can do great things!

As we make phone calls to our vulnerable parishioners, I want to give you some advice. First, remember that the people you are calling might be in very difficult situations and take that out on you. They might even not want to talk to you or hang up on you. That is okay, it is not your fault; it is the circumstances. Stay calm, talk slowly and articulate your words. Many of our seniors have hearing impairments. Listen.

Below are two scripts to help you. Do not worry if you forget something or don’t say it exactly as written; it’s better that you be your natural self. They will appreciate your humanness. Sometimes you will have people who go right into talking and you cannot get the script across, that’s okay, listen and then try to fit in your talking points. Remember when you are giving any numbers to say them slowly and twice, or ask if that they got the number before you exit the call (or have them repeat the number back to you for confirmation). It’s important they have a number to call back.

I doubt this will happen, but if someone has a real emergency, tell him or her you are going to hang up and that they should call 911. If they cannot, tell them you will hang up and call 911 and send them to their address.

I would suggest in the beginning of the call, as soon as you naturally can, let them know that you are calling on my behalf, and that you are a member of the (parish name) community. This will help ease the person on the other end and help them realize this is not a scam.

I am hoping that you will “adopt” the persons to whom you have been assigned. Right now, most of them won’t want or need anything. As this continues, they probably will. Please plan to check back every five days or so until this is over. Again, I am extremely grateful for you in this difficult time. You are not only the future of the Church, but its present. We need you more than ever, right now.

Peace,  
Father \_\_\_\_\_\_

XXX-XXX-XXXX

**Sample Script for Volunteers**  
*Adapted from Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier Parish*

**If caller answers:**

Hello this is....[insert name]

I’m calling on behalf of Father \_\_\_\_\_\_ from (parish name).

May I speak to Mr. or Ms. [insert name]

How are you?

As the coronavirus pandemic continues, we wanted you to know that there is a team of parishioners ready and willing to help during these challenging times. Know that we are here to help. Do you have any needs currently? We would be happy to assist if you’re in need, or if you just need to talk...

Is there something you need now?

Can I call and check in with you again?

Would you like to pray together? [Can offer an Our Father, Hail Mary, or personal prayer]

Feel free to call me any time. My number is....[Your Number here] Ask if have the number or have them repeat it.

**If the call goes to voicemail:**

Hello this is....[insert name]

I’m calling on behalf of Father \_\_\_\_\_\_ from (parish name).

We are calling to check in and see how you are doing. As the coronavirus pandemic continues, we want you to know a team of parishioners are ready and willing to help. We are happy to help in connecting you to any resources you might need, or if you simply would like someone to talk to on the phone. Please don’t hesitate to call us. You can call me [insert name] at...[insert number]. Again, this is [insert name] calling on behalf of Father \_\_\_\_\_\_ and you can reach me at...[insert number]

**Tracking contacts as a community:**

Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier has been utilizing a Google Sheet document to track phone calls as a group. Here is a template like the one they are using. As volunteers make their calls, they update the document. Volunteers who are assigned to specific parishioners will keep in touch throughout the pandemic.

Since shared documents can be edited by multiple people, it is important to ensure that information is not deleted. Some parishioners may prefer to receive an Excel sheet or printed list of contacts.

**Sample Letter to Vulnerable Parishioners from a fellow Parishioner** *Adapted from Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier Parish*

Mrs. A. Jones  
XXX Wilmette Avenue, XXXX IL XXXXX

Dear Mrs. Jones,

My name is Jane Smith. I am writing to you on behalf of Fr. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at (parish name).

I am part of a committee that has offered to reach out to other members of our community during this pandemic. I am available to help if you need resources, or just have a chat with you if you’d like to talk during this uncertain time.

I tried to call you this past week but unfortunately the phone number we have is disconnected (or your voicemail was full and was not accepting messages).

I would like to get in touch with you. Please feel free to give me a call at XXX-XXX-XXXX or you can send me an email at ([name@email.com](mailto:name@email.com)).

I hope you are keeping well and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith

**Additional Resources to Share**

**Catholic Charities:**

https://cc.dio.org/programs/

General Help Line: (217) 523-9201

**For rental assistance, SNAP benefits, or utility assistance**, visit www.mrelief.com.

**Liturgy and Prayer**

Live-stream or recorded Masses: <https://www.dio.org/masslivestreams>

Multiple opportunities for Daily Mass

Multiple opportunities for Sunday Mass

Daily Rosary

Holy Angels Parish, Woodriver

Holy Family, Decatur

St. Anthony of Padua, Quincy

St. John the Evangelist,Carrollton

St Mary, Alton

Divine Mercy Chaplet:

Holy Angles Parish, Woodriver

Stations of the Cross:

Holy Angles Parish, Woodriver

Sacred Heart, Effingham

Prayers for Protection : <https://grow.ourcatholicradio.org/sites/covnetcontent/files/procession_to_avert_epidemics.pdf>

Daily reflections on Mass: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9SxnVu5Mt7YNlduImwKQdQ>