



## COVID – 19 MERGER DISCUSSION

### 1. Q. Why do we need to merge?

**Answer:** As a result of this pandemic, the ensuing economic impact, and what will be a two year recovery period, many parishes will face extreme financial challenges. With the main source of revenue, offertory, vulnerable to the economic recovery, ability to bring people back to worship, people's willingness to gather in large groups may leave parishes in a place where they can no longer pay employees or pay their bills.

Parishes need to envision what the next two years will look like and how can they preserve and grow ministry within their current collaborative or parishes. How can they position themselves to be able to survive the two year period to get through to the other side of this pandemic? As individual parishes, many will not have the financial resources to remain financially viable and stable until that time comes. In some cases, one or more of the parishes in a collaborative will be unable to pay for their share of operating costs. This has a ripple effect for the remaining parishes and can affect their ability to maintain positive cashflow and pay bills.

From a resource/budget perspective: Look at the resources you are receiving now during this pandemic. Plan for offertories of half of what you had before, increasing perhaps to three quarters of what you had after an eighteen-month period. Will your parish be able to survive on that level of giving? If not, your parish needs to consider alternatives.

### 2. Q. What is the difference between a merger and a collaborative?

**Answer:** In a collaborative, the assets (cash, real estate) and obligations (debts, bills, deferred maintenance) of each parish are isolated from one another, and cannot be shared. In a merger, those assets are combined, as are the obligations. The new parish inherits all of the assets and obligations of the two or three previous ones.

### 3. Q. What happens to the territory of the parishes during a merger? How are parish boundaries affected?

**Answer:** The new parish inherits all of the territory of the merging parishes.

### 4. Q. Does the money that parishes have go to the Archdiocese during a merger?

**Answer:** No. All of the assets **and** all of the obligations of merging parishes stay with the parishioners.

### 5. Q. What happens to pastors during a merger?

**Answer:** Because a new parish is created, a new assignment has to be made, and all assignments are made by the Cardinal. That being said, usually the newly appointed pastor would be the pastor of the former parishes. In the case where there have been two different pastors of the merging parishes, the Cardinal will make a choice, or will assign someone new.

**6. Q. What are the benefits to merging when we are in a collaborative now?**

**Answer:** To bring multiple parishes together as one new parish and a single community of faith removes the territorial and/or structural issues that exist. In a collaborative, they are separate parish communities working together; however, each parish is separate and distinct. They function as individual parishes.

As a single new parish, they would be able to visualize themselves as a new community. From this comprehensive perspective, the parish leadership is able to determine the resources needed for the vitality of this new parish.

**7. Q. I thought Disciples in Mission was about growing the Church and here we are talking about mergers?**

**Answer:** *Disciples in Mission* is not a plan for downsizing. It is a plan for growth. A merger is something that should be considered in the event that a parish's vitality, viability or sustainability comes into question or is becoming a growing issue of concern. Vitality relates to the sacramental life, programs, and evangelization. Viability relates to a lack of response to the evangelization efforts in a parish. Financial sustainability relates to the availability of resources to sustain the existing mission of the Church.

With the pandemic and the economic impact facing us as a community of faith, there are parishes that are facing sustainability issues. In light of this, a merger should be considered by a collaborative where one or more of the parishes have tenuous vitality, viability and sustainability pressures. This warrants consideration of a parish merger where two or more parishes, struggling to exist on their own, come together to form a healthy, vibrant, sustainable parish.

These efforts toward a merger are undertaken for the purpose of strengthening the mission of the Church and the good of the Collaborative.

**8. Q. How can we discuss merger when we do not have a collaborative partner?**

**Answer:** You should be looking to the surrounding parishes to determine what possibilities exist for a merger. If a parish is having financial difficulty and is unwilling to work towards a solution with a surrounding parish, then it may result in the eventual failure of that parish. We encourage early conversations between parishes in an area in which those parishes may not be in collaboratives yet, in order to get discussions going. The involvement of the Regional Bishop, the Episcopal Vicar, and the Vicar Forane can be helpful in this.

**9. Q. How does merging parishes lead to greater spiritual vitality and financial stability?**

**Answer:** It is from the creation of something new. The new parish can identify the resources needed to support and enhance the ministry for growth and creativity while making decisions as to what is not needed. Parishes are then able to move forward with what is needed for one parish community and use the excess resources to generate revenue.

**10. Q. These are difficult days and we are trying to simply maintain what we have. How will merging assist us in moving from maintenance to mission?**

**Answer:** Merging parishes will allow for the combining of resources from the former parishes. The new parish will then be able to assess which assets are best suited for the ministry going forward and rebuilding their mission. During that process, those assets identified as not necessary or needed for the future mission of this new parish can be “monetized” to provide funding to invest in their future.

**11. Q. What happens to the debt in the merging parishes?**

**Answer:** All the assets and **debt** of the parishes merging goes with them to the New Parish or parish into which they are merged. We will work with the parishes post merger to develop a strategy for repayment.

**12. Q. Who decides that a merger is necessary?**

**Answer:** The pastor, after having thoroughly consulted with his Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Council and the People of God would, after careful discernment, petition the Cardinal who ultimately decides, after consulting with the Presbyteral Council, as in Canon Law it is his exclusive decision.

**13. Q. Does the Archdiocese have a list of parishes that are going to close?**

**Answer:** No, most definitely not. The movement toward a merger is a local decision. The Archdiocese stands committed to assisting any parishes that are requesting a merger but is not instructing parishes what they need to do.

**14. Q. Is this a directive for all parishes and collaboratives, or only those particularly in need?**

**Answer:** It actually is not a directive at all. There are many parishes that may not survive on their own financially through this pandemic and recession. We want the church to survive in these areas, so we are encouraging local leadership to be bold, honest, and forward thinking in their planning. But there is no directive.

**15. Q. We have some cash reserves, so why can't we just use that money to get us through this difficult time?**

**Answer:** The opening of our Churches and resuming to normal operations will be a lengthy process. The recovery period could approximate 18 – 24 months or longer. What will be the financial position of the parish at the end of that period? Most parishes will have significantly reduced its resources for Ministry and the ability to rebuild. The parish is now in a reactive planning position instead of being proactive in determining its future.

**16. Q. Why isn't the Archdiocese willing to give us (loan us) the money we need to survive the coming months?**

**Answer:** Loans to parishes are made through the Revolving Loan Fund. The Revolving Loan fund capacity to issue loans is based on the amounts on deposit and the loan repayments being made by parishes. With this pandemic, many parishes have withdrawn their funds from savings to pay bills and meet payroll. Thus, the capacity for offering loans is diminished. We are not in a position to issue loans that cannot be repaid. Beyond the Revolving Loan Fund, the Archdiocese does not have any ability to loan funds to parishes.

**17. Q. Does a percentage of money from the merged parishes go to the Archdiocese?**

**Answer:** All the assets and debt of the parishes merging goes with them to the New Parish or the parish they are merged into.

**18. Q. What does the merger process look like under the current restraints of this pandemic?**

**Answer:** The process of a merger involves a modified version of the typical steps.

- a. The pastor has consultation with Pastoral and Finance Councils via technology (Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, GoToMeeting)
- b. The pastor also engages his staff and other parish leadership in the question.
- c. The pastor encourages the councils to reach out to parishioners, by phone or email, and get their feedback. He asks them to keep a record of the feedback.
- d. The pastor convenes as many meetings of the council as necessary to process their feedback, both what they themselves think and what they have heard in their outreach.
- e. If the pastor feels that a more thorough consultation of the parish is called for, he could send an email to the entire mailing list of the parishes, putting forward the case and asking for their feedback. Parishioners could be directed to a special email address (easy to set up in Gmail, and even better to do in Microsoft 365, which has polling features available in the FORMS app), and then the pastor and council members could read all of that feedback. [In preparation for this, a parish could set up the account earlier, and get word out to all parishioners, asking them to send an email to that account, thus creating a list of parishioner emails.]
- f. If the pastor feels that an email consultation of the parish is insufficient, he could use a service such as Pilot Printing to send a paper mailing to his parishioners, asking for feedback.
- g. Through all of this, it is helpful if the pastor keeps the Office of Pastoral Planning advised of the conversation. That office can be reached by email ([psoper@rcab.org](mailto:psoper@rcab.org)) or phone (Father Paul Soper's cell = 978-502-1920).
- h. When the above consultation is completed, the Pastor writes a letter to Cardinal requesting a merger and the reason why. The letter is sent to the Office of Pastoral Planning. The Regional Bishop and Vicar Forane also need to send letters.
- i. The Cardinal will consult with the Presbyteral Council, and then a decision is made.
- j. The Pastor is then notified of the decision.

**19. Q. What is the difference between a merger and consolidation?**

**Answer:** “Merger” and “consolidation” are words sometimes used interchangeably in our local practice, but there are two types of alterations of parishes:

- a. **Two or more parishes come together to form a new parish**, with a new name, new tax ID number, and a new financial reporting entity is created. The two former parishes end their individual missions and the new parish is created from the two with a new name. See Canon 121. A recent example of this is when Saint Joseph, Saint Ann, and Saint Catherine Parishes in Somerville came together to form Saint Louis and Zelig Martin Parish.
- b. **One parish is joined to another existing parish**. The existing parish retains its name and tax ID number and assumes the territory (if applicable), parishioners, assets and liabilities of the other parish. The other parish ends its mission. See Canon 123. A recent example of this is when Saint Charles Parish in Waltham became a part of Saint Mary Parish in Waltham.

**20. Q. What happens to the church buildings (i.e. the worship sites) in a merger?**

**Answer:** The merger of several parishes is not the same thing as the closure of churches. Once a parish has merged, they can begin, perhaps slowly, to ask what the right use of all of their property is, including the churches. If there are grave causes and it becomes clear that one or more of the church buildings should not be used as a church anymore, the pastor must petition the Archbishop for a decree relegating the church building for profane use. That request must be presented to the Presbyteral Council and they must give their feedback to the Archbishop. This never happens at the same time as the petition to merge the parishes. After the church has been relegated, the parish will work with the Property Management department to consider a lease or ground lease option for the surplus property.

**21. Q. Who can start the discussion about merging parishes?**

**Answer:** The pastor can raise the topic of a merger for discussion and consideration with the finance councils and pastoral council of the parishes. As leaders in the parish, the pastor consults with them for their experience and support. It is essential that sufficient information be provided to the councils so that they understand the circumstances that led up to the discussion about why a merger should be considered.

**22. Q. Does the Archdiocese offer direction and guidance during the process of a merger?**

**Answer:** During the period between the initial presentation to the councils and the follow-up consultation with parishioners, there can be several opportunities for engagement with Pastoral Center offices (Pastoral Planning, Parish Services and Canonical Affairs) to maintain open lines of communication with the pastor. Pastoral Center staff will be available to respond to any questions or issues that get raised.

**23. Q. How can the new parish survive with such a large amount of debt?**

**Answer:** The new parish will have combined assets and debt. From these resources the new parish can identify those resources that are excess and seek to monetize them. The Archdiocese will work with you during that process to determine the ability to pay until such time as the income from the assets is realized.

**24. Q. Even if the new parish decides to use one parish location, how are the operating expenses reduced before anything is done with the property.**

**Answer:** With the buildings being used less frequently, there will be a natural reduction in utility expenses. It is not recommended that the buildings be completely shuttered due to the risk of a real estate tax bill but, it is likely that parishes will see a decline in utility expenses from reduced usage.

**25. Q. Will we be able to sell property? The Archdiocese has been emphasizing the leasing of property.**

**Answer:** Archdiocesan policy expresses a strong preference for long term leasing of property rather than outright sale. The rationale is to create a long term, steady stream of income for the parish to sustain itself into the future. In the past, we have seen parishes sell a real estate asset and then use the proceeds to satisfy operating deficits. Generally speaking, we have seen these sale funds used up over a period of 18 months. At the end of that time, the parish has neither the property nor the money. Also, after the pandemic, it is difficult to say what the commercial real estate market will look like. It would not be surprising to see real estate values decrease significantly. As a result, the sale of any real estate may not realize the values we have seen in the past. That being said, these questions are decided on a case by case basis.

**26. Q. Can buildings that are not churches be sold?**

**Answer:** The disposition of a non-church building is somewhat easier than that of a church, but the preference for lease over sale referenced above still applies.

**27. Q. What about leasing a school building to the town who will have to absorb excess students from the closure?**

**Answer:** Leases to cities and towns can be lucrative and are worth pursuing. If this opportunity arises, please contact Property Management.

**28. Q. What about maintaining tax exemptions on closed buildings?**

**Answer:** This differs community by community and is an important question. The Property Management department can work with parishes to minimize this potential risk.

**29. Q. If two parishes merge, who gets to decide how to spend the money?**

**Answer:** The new parish will have a single pastor, and he will have a single parish finance council to advise him on all financial matters within the parish. There should be a member of the Finance Council on the parish pastoral Council as well to ensure appropriate communication occurs for budgeting and planning for mission.

**30. Q. What is the speed with which this should happen? Are we looking at a few months or a few years?**

**Answer:** The urgency is driven by parish finances, so that is a local question. Many parishes are facing financial issues which will become disabling in the next couple of years or less, so there may be a need to act with greater urgency. The Presbyteral Council is meeting with a greater frequency in order to allow more mergers to happen more quickly.

**31. Q. What happens to parish staff? Will staff members lose their jobs? What if a parish is already at the smallest staff possible?**

**Answer:** This is a hard question because there is no doubt that mergers will have an impact on parish staffs. For most of our parishes, a large part of their weekly expenses goes to salaries, and it is hard to imagine real savings happening without some staff adjustments. Parishes that are already at minimal staffs may need to merge in order to extend the reach and effectiveness of the few staff people they have.

**32. Q. When making these decisions, shouldn't we be considering how hard it will be for staff to find a new job now?**

**Answer:** We would hope that all pastors are people of high compassion. But sometimes faithful leadership involves making decisions that will be very difficult for people. If a pastor is facing laying off a beloved staff person or not being able to pay any of his staff or his insurances or utilities, he may need to make a decision that both the staff person and the parish as a whole will find difficult to support. That is what leadership looks like sometimes.

**33. Q. Shouldn't staffs, rather than councils, be advising the pastor on mergers?**

**Answer:** Most pastors have good solid relationships with their staffs and will obviously draw them into conversations. That being said, the role of advising the pastor on issues relating to the governance of the parish belongs to the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council.

**34. Q. What percentage of parishes will be merging?**

**Answer:** We do not have a list, so we really do not know.

**35. Q. Isn't it true that this has all been decided already?**

**Answer:** No, that is not true.

**36. Q. What if a pastor does not agree with this plan?**

**Answer:** There is no plan. However there is no emergency funding available for parishes that cannot meet their expenses.

**37. Q. Will there be a follow up on this process? Will the parishes that need to merge be contacted?**

**Answer:** The most natural follow up would be for the local pastor to call Father Soper to discuss this.

**38. Q. Who decides on the new name of our parishes?**

**Answer:** The pastor in consultation with the councils and parishioners submits three possible names for the merged parish, indicating their first choice. Those three names are then sent to Cardinal Sean and he will decide from the suggested names. Usually he chooses the name that was listed as “first” on the list of parish names. However, since it is impossible to gather parishioners for the hopefully joyful discussion of a new name, and since the choosing of the new name does not necessarily have urgency to it, parishes can opt for a temporary name, sort of a “place-holder” – until the date when a new name can be chosen. So, for instance, Saint Mary and Saint Joseph parishes become a new parish, which temporarily is name Saint Mary/Saint Joseph, and gets a new name later on, when the parishioners can better gather to choose one.

**39. Q. Could larger churches be built to handle more parishioners further apart?**

**Answer:** One collaborative is already looking into that. That being said, building a church is extremely expensive, and would be outside of the means of the vast majority of our communities. Oftentimes, the cost of land and new construction makes it prohibitive.

**40. Q. Are mergers only within collaboratives? May some mergers need to extend beyond current collaborative relationships?**

**Answer:** Some mergers may well need to extend beyond current collaborative relationships. It would be a very good thing for all of the pastors in an area to engage this conversation.

**41. Q. Should parishes going into collaboratives in 2021 be moved up?**

**Answer:** Perhaps. In many cases it could be at least a fruitful local conversation between the pastors and councils.

**42. Q. Will “single parish collaboratives” now be partnered with others for a merger?**

**Answer:** That may well be necessary on the local level. There is no kind of large plan like that moving forward on the diocesan level, but it would be a very good conversation for local leaders to have.

**43. Q. What do we do if our partner parish does not want to do anything?**

**Answer:** That is a difficult situation. Parishes and pastors have a great deal of autonomy. We think that all you can do is to encourage the lay leadership of the parish to try to engage the pastor on the benefits of collaboration or merger.

**44. Q. Who will intervene if local merger talks fall apart?**

**Answer:** The Archdiocese stands ready to help in those talks, but only at the invitation of the local pastors.

**45. Q. What are the downsides of a merger?**

**Answer:** Some people, feeling deeply the hurt of losing the identity of their parish, will leave. Others, who are ready for an excuse to leave, might use this as a time to do so. Realistically, some people are going to use the pandemic as a reason not to come back anyway. The changes involved can be unsettling to the parishioners. Some parish staff may lose their jobs.



**46. Q. Will central ministries be well enough funded to continue to help parishes through mergers?**

**Answer:** Central Ministries, along with our parishes, has been significantly impacted by this pandemic and the economic realities that have ensued. Central Ministries and our parishes will need to make a careful assessment of their resources and, within their existing budgets, determine how they can move forward and continue operating as we navigate our way through this crisis.

**47. Q. Could a parish be closed by the local community without going through the merger process?**

**Answer:** The only way for a parish to close canonically is through a canonical process, like a merger. That being said, in this era in which financial help from the Archdiocese is nearly impossible, it is perhaps possible for a parish to fail financially if they do not get out ahead and plan for their financial future. At that point no one knows exactly what would happen, but it would be far more chaotic and disruptive than a planned merger. In some cases, the doors of a church could be closed but the parish still exist – what happened for several years with Saint Vincent in South Boston is an example of this.

**48. Q. If two parishes merge, what happens to the parish school?**

**Answer:** The school becomes the parish school of the new parish. It brings with it all of its assets and all of its obligations.

**49. Q. Should local schools be merging?**

**Answer:** The question of schools is complicated and really needs its own set of answers. The Catholic Schools Office is holding webinars and preparing guidance which we hope will prove helpful. Pastors will play a vital role in school consolidation and merger discussions.

**50. Q. What should we be doing about planning for the rush of funeral and memorial Masses when we reopen?**

**Answer:** We would be very interested in hearing what plans different parishes are making. We know that some parishes have already started having conversations with the local funeral directors, and that seems like a good start. Some parishes have also been assuring parishioners that the announced Masses that have not been public (i.e. Mass intentions) have been being said, but that if the family chooses, they can reschedule once it is clear when we can reopen.

**51. Q. Is there any information on when we will be reopening?**

**Answer:** The advisories from the Governor have not yet settled on a particular date. In the counties that make up the Archdiocese of Boston, new cases and new deaths continue on a daily basis. We will keep you closely informed as new information becomes available.

**52. Q. Should parishioners be tested before being allowed to come back to church?**

**Answer:** At this time, it is unclear that with the limited availability of tests that would ever be possible.

**53. Q. What is the name of the aid program for parishes?**

**Answer:** Many parishes have applied for assistance under the Small Business Association – a plan called the Paycheck Protection Program.

**54. Q. Will parish staffs be tested before being allowed to return to work?**

**Answer:** At this time, testing is still being restricted to those who exhibit symptoms and have a physician's order.

**55. Q. At the end of the eight weeks of the PPP loans, will there be clear guidance on the need for staff reductions?**

**Answer:** Each parish needs to make a careful assessment of its resources and, within its existing budget, determine how the parish can move forward and continue operating after the PPP loans funds have been exhausted. The unfortunate reality of this evaluation may lead to your needing to reduce the number of employees due to an inability to meet ongoing payroll obligations. Our Human Resources Office is available to assist you through this process. As you deliberate the process you need to follow, please note that any reductions that do not apply uniformly to all staff should be reviewed with Human Resources to confirm that they do not violate applicable anti-discrimination laws.

**56. Q. Do those parishes that have been granted PPP loans need to retain staff or rehire those already laid off?**

**Answer:** If an individual is no longer employed by the parish/school due to termination for cause, retirement, voluntary resignation, or death, do not return that person to payroll. Do return everyone else to payroll, regardless of whether they are working (remotely, at the office) or not (if you have already placed them on temporary layoff/furlough/leave without pay). Returning these individuals to payroll does not mean you are re-employing them.

**57. Q. Are there other resources, either government or private, that we should be looking to for assistance?**

**Answer:** At the present that we are not aware of any other government resources available to Churches that we could look to for assistance as the government modified the SBA loan programs and Unemployment benefits specifically for Churches and faith based organizations. Typically, these types of relief are unavailable. Private resources such as through our own organizations are extremely limited as a direct result of the economic impact of this pandemic.

**58. Q. Can parishes apply for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan Emergency Advance through the SBA? Also, there are some payroll tax deferrals.**

**Answer:** Parishes could apply for an EID Loan advance of up to \$10,000.00 (maximum) which could be converted to a grant. Beyond the \$10,000.00, if granted to the Parish, would be treated like a traditional commercial loan which would require collateral/security. This may involve canonical approvals related to encumbering Parish property. Please note that if the Parish received or is in the process of receiving a PPP Loan you cannot use an EID Loan for payroll, etc. In simpler terms, an EID Loan and a PPP Loan cannot be used for the same purposes. Also the EID Loan is not forgivable with the exception of the possibility of receiving the \$10,000 grant. The grant, however, affects the forgiveness amount of the PPP Loan by offsetting it by that amount.

**59. Q. Does the RCAB have an insurance plan in place similar to MA unemployment and would parish employees who may be furloughed or laid off be eligible for the extra \$600 federal unemployment payment?**

**Answer:** The CARES Act, passed on March 27, 2020, will make federal/state unemployment assistance available for individual employed by parishes facing loss of wages due to the effects of COVID-19. Specific information about the extent and nature of these benefits is available here: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/pandemic-unemployment-assistance-benefits-guide>. To the extent that these federal/state unemployment benefits are not available to staff members who are permanently laid off, the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) will be available to staff members otherwise eligible for TAP.

**60. Q. Can we use Inspiring Hope money to meet financial obligations other than what the money was designated for?**

**Answer:** No. Parishes are obligated to spend the restricted funds they have raised through *Inspiring Hope* for the stated purposes of their capital campaign. You may not choose to spend these monies for any other purpose than for which it was given. This is not a trivial matter. Donors can take legal action against a nonprofit organization that they believe is misusing restricted donations.

**61. Q. Can we withdraw large sums from our Common Investment Fund accounts at this time – more than just the dividends?**

**Answer:** Yes, provided the funds are unrestricted. If restricted, a redemption request would need provide support that the conditions of the restriction are being met.

Below is additional information from the annual investment funds review. This is also available on the [bostoncatholic.org](http://bostoncatholic.org) site.

- Subscriptions to, and redemptions from, the investment funds can only be made on the first business day of each calendar month. Notification of a request for redemption or purchase should be received by the Investment Funds no later than the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month preceding the transaction date.
- As a matter of policy, CIF distributes one percent (1%) of its net assets to its members at the end of every calendar quarter. All members receive a distribution to their account, but individual members can elect to either receive cash or to reinvest the distribution back into CIF on the first day of the following month.

**62. Q. Will deacon assignments be impacted by mergers?**

**Answer:** Yes.

**63. Q. Can deacons or lay people be considered for roles as administrators of parishes?**

**Answer:** The Archdiocese was involved in a broad consultation on the question of deacon administrators and had gathered a fair amount of feedback on the issue. On the other side of the shutdown, the task force that has been put together to review the feedback will begin to meet to pick up the process. At the current time, the question for consultation was about deacon administrators rather than lay administrators.

**64. Q. If we go from three parishes to a single parish with two churches, will we lose one of our two priests?**

**Answer:** Not necessarily. This is a complicated time in terms of clergy personnel assignments, so no one can make very good predictions about what will happen.

**65. Q. Can the insurance bills be suspended for the month of May?**

**Answer:** The property and casualty bills were waived for the month of April, but unfortunately they cannot be waived for an additional month in May.

**66. Q. Will the IFRM be changed in any way in response to what is happening?**

**Answer:** The IFRM Model was designed with a mechanism built in to address the issue of parishes that are experiencing financial hardship and their ability to pay through the Abatement process. The Central Ministry Tithe and Net Rental Income Tax Abatement applications have been provided through the weekly mailing. If you need assistance please contact your Parish Services Consultant.

**67. Q. Is there any way to help parishes find staff that may have been let go from other parishes to fill positions they may need?**

**Answer:** Yes. Speak with your Parish Service consultant or your Faith Formation and Evangelization consultant, and they will be able to help you.

**68. Q. If a parish does not meet the Catholic Appeal goal, will they still be penalized?**

**Answer:** We are in the process of considering all aspects of the Catholic Appeal, along with all of our advancement activities, and don't yet have any definitive answers to provide about how things will proceed. That said, the fiscal health of our parishes - the key venues for evangelization - are at top of mind as we traverse toward the future. As soon as we can offer clear guidance with regard to the Catholic Appeal, we will move to do so.

**69. Q. In the short term, can the Catholic Appeal come up with a straight line 50/50 sharing of donations made thus far and not requiring the assessment threshold?**

**Answer:** We are currently looking at everything Catholic Appeal-related and will be sharing specific information once we have it. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we all work together through this time of pandemic.

**70. Q. What is the future of pastoral planning? Will collaboratives still be the focus?**

**Answer:** That is an excellent question. It is too early to say definitively. We are exploring all options and watching what happens.

**71. Q. What about the Year of the Eucharist?**

**Answer:** We are working on what that can still look like, and will be in touch with all of the coordinators very soon.

**72. Q. Are any churches open for private prayer during the shutdown?**

**Answer:** Yes, some are. The priest or deacon has to be present. No more than ten people can be in the church at any time. The church has to be disinfected regularly. Some parishes have chosen to keep their churches open for limited times following these guideline – others have not. Some local municipalities have insisted that all churches be closed.

**73. Q. What about scheduled weddings?**

**Answer:** Scheduled weddings can go forward as long as only ten people are present. *Transformed in Love*, the Archdiocesan marriage prep program, is going forward strongly in an online form. That being said, many couples will choose to reschedule their weddings, and parishes should exercise maximum flexibility in allowing them to do so.

**74. Q. We have two weddings scheduled for August. What should we do?**

**Answer:** See the answer right above. It is unclear at this point what we will be able to do in August. The couples may well want to reschedule.

**75. Q. Can we have outdoor Masses in large venues?**

**Answer:** Currently, no. But as the restart of things in Massachusetts proceeds, that may become an option.

**76. Q. Can we have outdoor Masses in parking lots with people staying in their cars?**

**Answer:** Currently, no – the same as above. But as the restart of things in Massachusetts proceeds, that may become an option.

**77. Q. Parishes should be live streaming their Sunday Masses, and putting a link for online giving with the video.**

**Answer:** We agree that any parish that can possibly find a way of doing this should do it.

**78. Q. For the parishes that are streaming online, is there a resource we can use for music licenses for online use? Is there a list of songs that parishes can use at no cost?**

**Answer:** For any music that is live streamed (music sung while processing in, music played in background during Adoration, music during a video), the parish or pastor will need to get a license. One License is a company that works specifically with hymns/church music, and would be the best place to start. They can also contact the musician or agent directly for more modern Praise & Worship pieces, but often these will have a higher licensing fee. If any music, that is not in the public domain, is played on YouTube, Facebook, or Instagram, these companies will remove the videos eventually. We will look into this further and get more information to the parishes.

**79. Q. What about social justice programs that collect food for the food pantries and items for Pregnancy Help?**

**Answer:** They are all the more important at a time like this and should be encouraged to continue and be strengthened. Some food pantries have gone over to giving out mostly gift cards now, and therefore cash donations to food pantries are desperately needed.

**80. Q. Is there any guidance on how to make parish faith formation programs go virtual?**

**Answer:** Yes. In the next couple of weeks we will be putting out information on that, including likely a webinar in the Monday webinar time slot.

**81. Q. What is the likelihood of Vacation Bible School this summer?**

**Answer:** At this point in the epidemic, it is very hard to predict past a few weeks what will be allowed and what will not. That having been said, it seems likely that the phasing of the reopening would make it very hard to have a program like Vacation Bible School in July or August. Probably virtual plans should be made, if your parish can do that.

**82. Q. What about summer youth ministry service trips?**

**Answer:** Essentially, this is the same answer as to the question above about Vacation Bible School. It is impossible to predict whether things like service trips will be allowed this summer. Since they are very expensive to plan for, it is probably wise to reconsider them, and to see if something local and more flexible could take their place this year. But that is advice, not a mandate.

**83. Q. Should faith formation programs plan to be online next year?**

**Answer:** That would probably be a good idea. There is no certainty about what will be allowed, and, a deeper question, there is no certainty about what parents will want to do. Even if classes are allowed, not all parents will want to send their children to those classes. The development of online faith formation makes a great deal of sense. The Faith Formation staff of the Archdiocese can help you to envision what that could look like on a local level.

**84. Q. What can we do to emphasize the role of parents as the principal religious formators of their children?**

**Answer:** If many of our faith formation programs begin to emphasize online classes, parents will need to step up all the more into that role. There are already a number of ideas at <http://bostoncatholic.org/virtual-evangelization>

**85. Q. Should refunds be issued for faith formation fees since many classes were not held?**

**Answer:** There is no central policy. We think this is something that the pastor, his staff, and his finance council should discuss. It would be a good gesture.

**86. Q. Could the Archdiocese look into the purchase of a license for Google Classroom, to help parishes go virtual with faith formation?**

**Answer:** We will look into that.

**87. Q. Could the Archdiocese develop a virtual catechism so that parishes don't have to make that expenditure themselves?**

**Answer:** The Faith Formation staff is working on resources for parishes for this purpose.

**88. Q. What plans are being made for Confirmations?**

**Answer:** Once we have an idea of when we will return, the parish should arrange with the Regional Bishop/Episcopal Vicar if possible for him to come. If the schedule is too difficult for the parish the pastor can be asked to be delegated to do the Confirmation.

**89. Q. Can the diocese provide more virtual retreats to uplift the faithful?**

**Answer:** Yes. We will look into it.

**90. Q. Aside from streaming/recording Mass each week for the parishioners, are there any suggestions for evangelization during these times? We want to reach out the best way we can and keep people engaged on some level?**

**Answer:** We encourage you to regularly check out the page <http://bostoncatholic.org/virtual-evangelization> and to sign up for the Virtual Evangelization FlockNotes from the Secretariat for Evangelization and Discipleship – sign up for those on <http://Flocknote.com/Boston>.