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“In our day Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples” echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church’s mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary ‘going forth’”.

Pope Francis,  
*The Joy of the Gospel* (20)

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## Preparing to “Go Forth”

There is a lot going on right now — staying connected with parishioners, providing opportunities for prayer and ongoing faith formation remotely, and managing the financial health of our parishes. But now is also the time to plan for the day when we will be able to gather again as a community of faith with Jesus our Eucharistic Lord.

Reflect on the past few months and prayerfully seek the path forward that the Lord desires for your community. Keep three things in mind as you do so:

1. **Focus on the Mission.** It hasn’t changed; making disciples and equipping them to evangelize.
2. **Use what works.** You have had to get creative these past few weeks, don’t stop! Continue to engage parishioners and to offer opportunities for prayer and ongoing formation using all the tools at your disposal. Remote options shouldn’t end once we can gather in person.
3. **Let go of what is not effective.** Resist the urge to bring everything back as it was before. Things will be different going forward, needs and resources will have changed, and your priorities and initiatives should reflect that.

Governor Baker’s announcement that houses of worship can resume services is just the beginning of a process that will take months to unfold. Active and intentional engagement, prayerful discernment, and listening to the needs, fears and desires of your community will be critical for success. It is helpful to look ahead in phases, rather than all at once, especially since we don’t know how public health guidelines will evolve. We have used the resumption of public Masses as a guidepost to help parishes prepare to move forward.

# 1

## Before Public Masses Resume

This is both a time to prepare for when public Masses resume and to offer other opportunities to engage parishioners in accordance with public safety directives.

**How will you communicate with parishioners? Who can you engage to assist in creating your messages of Welcome, Comfort, Hope and Gratitude?**

- ◇ Create signage for outside and inside the church.
- ◇ Update your website and social media.
- ◇ Send a mass mailing to parishioners and leverage local newspapers, TV, and radio.
- ◇ Have volunteers call parishioners to:
  - ◇ update them on current initiatives,
  - ◇ inquire about concerns or ways to help people feel safe coming back,
  - ◇ and offer to pray for their specific intentions.

**How will you help people prepare for the resumption of the liturgy and offer other opportunities for worship?**

- ◇ Make confessions more widely available with simple guides to help people who may not have been in a while.
- ◇ Celebrate Morning and Evening Prayer publicly.
- ◇ Offer extended times of adoration and consider:
  - ◇ having music,
  - ◇ inviting people to attend and light a candle for their intentions.
- ◇ Reach out to all involved in liturgical ministries and prepare them to welcome people.
  - ◇ Train them in ways to ensure the safety of all participants.
  - ◇ Walk through logistics beginning with parking lot through dismissal:
    - ◇ Gathering
    - ◇ Seating
    - ◇ Distribution of Communion
    - ◇ Sending Forth
- ◇ Arrange for mental health professional to be onsite during public gatherings to assist anyone who may experience anxiety or other emotional distress.
  - ◇ Ask a parishioner who is a mental health professional to volunteer their time.

**How can you engage parishioners in other ways beyond the liturgy?**

- ◇ Organize a food drive or other initiative to meet a temporal need in the community.
- ◇ Invite people to help clean and/or decorate the church and grounds.
- ◇ Have children make posters to display around the church.

**“And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’”**

Revelation 21:5

## 2

# When Public Masses Resume

This will be a time of gradual transition that takes place over many weeks or months. People at risk will need to avoid public gatherings and others who can join may be afraid to resume at first. All must be treated with pastoral sensitivity and in accordance with public safety directives.

**How will you create a good first experience when people arrive, knowing this will take place over weeks or month?**

- ◇ Expand the number of greeters (and staff) welcoming people.
  - ◇ Well trained Greeters should have name tags especially if they are wearing masks.
  - ◇ Safety procedures, including attendance limits and physical distancing should be clearly communicated and enforced.
  - ◇ Provide opportunity for people to deal with fear and anxiety.
- ◇ Have a special prayer for all to recite at the end of Mass for continued healing and protection:

*Almighty and eternal God, we give you thanks for the grace of being able to worship you today assembled as the community of believers. You are our refuge in every danger, to whom we turn in our distress; in faith we pray look with compassion on the afflicted, grant eternal rest to the dead, comfort to mourners, healing to the sick, peace to the dying, strength to healthcare workers, work to the unemployed, wisdom to our leaders and the courage to reach out to all in love, so that together we may give glory to your holy name.*
- ◇ Ring the church bells for an extended period of time before every Mass.

**What other things can you do in those first few weeks?**

- ◇ Continue to stream Mass online for those who are not comfortable or not able to return in person.
- ◇ Launch an initiative to update contact information for parishioners.
- ◇ Offer weekend church office hours around Mass times to answer any questions, make Mass cards available, etc.

## 3

# The First 3–6 Months and Beyond

This is the time following the transition period when the rhythm of parish life begins to return. There may be longer term impacts which linger on, including the possibility of another wave of the virus, but this is an opportunity to memorialize our experience and embrace our future in Christ.

**How will you help your parish move through this experience as a community?**

- ◇ Offer a Mass of Remembrance for all who have died and couldn't have funerals. Invite families to bring photos like what some parishes do on All Souls Day. This could be in addition to offering funeral Masses (without the body present) for those families who would like them.
- ◇ Offer a Mass of Thanksgiving for medical professionals/first responders/"essential workers." Have special pins or ribbons they can wear and pray a special blessing for them.
- ◇ Create an intentional prayer space or dedicate a small shrine for all who were impacted by the global pandemic of 2020.

## How will you help parishioners connect their experience over these months to their relationship with Jesus?

- ◇ Encourage people to reflect on their experience by asking specific questions and invite responses. For example, where did you see Christ during these past months?
  - ◇ Establish small faith sharing groups to discuss and continue to leverage the virtual resources you have been using to increase engagement.
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  - ◇ Invite people to participate in a program like Alpha or Discovering Christ (both of which can be offered online).
- ◇ Select a few people to share their personal witness live, in writing, and/or on video.

## How will your parish build upon the lessons learned from this experience?

- ◇ Offer virtual component for all aspects of ongoing faith formation including sacramental preparation
- ◇ Expand ministry of hospitality and welcome, including training.
- ◇ Consider forming a communications ministry responsible for ongoing outreach and promotion.

**“Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”**

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Your Archdiocesan Evangelization Consultant is available to discuss any of these ideas with you to help you move your parish community forward. We also encourage you to share your own ideas so we can share them with others.*

<https://www.bostoncatholic.org/lffps/ffmd>



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