



# Return to In-Person Mass TOOLKIT

Stephen Brashers

## OVERVIEW

The Archdiocese of Seattle became the first in the United States to suspend in-person Mass in March 2020. At that time, the coronavirus taskforce was formed to develop guidance and safety protocols so parishes could safely return to in-person Mass.

With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, parishes quickly pivoted to livestreaming Mass while preparing their churches for safe worship. COVID Safety Officers followed safety protocols for each parish site and we are grateful to report that we have celebrated more than 50,000 Masses without any spread of the virus.

Today, parishes in Phase 3 are able to celebrate with 50% capacity so long as there is 6 feet of physical distancing. Some of our parishes are easily hitting this number, while others have not seen their parishioners return at the same rate.

Our goal of this toolkit is to provide parishes with recommendations and tools for how to engage parishioners and welcome them back to in-person Mass. This serves the ultimate goal of helping parishioners better know Jesus Christ through the Sacraments and embrace his mission of discipleship, nourished by the Sacraments. As Archbishop Etienne recently wrote, "Our hope is to renew and extend a vibrant faith, which comes from each encounter with the Risen Jesus."



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## SAFETY FIRST

While we are eager to welcome people back to in-person Mass, safety is paramount. At no time should we relax the safety standards to encourage more participation in the Mass or other ministries.



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We know that some people will not come back until they are vaccinated or they have underlying conditions. Some will not come back because they are fearful. All of these reasons are legitimate and people should not feel forced or shamed for not yet returning to in-person Mass.

Instead, we suggest taking a more positive, proactive approach welcoming people back to in-person Mass and be realistic in that this will be a gradual process over the next year.

## PHASE 1: LAY THE FOUNDATION IT STARTS WITH COMMUNICATION

### REBUILDING THE FOUNDATION WITH YOUR BASE

All parishes are in a relationship with their parishioners. Like any good relationship, positive, consistent communication is critical. Parishes should focus on strengthening this authentic relationship with parishioners before attempting to ask for other things like welcoming people back to in-person Mass and the Sacraments, asking for stewardship funding or expecting participation in other events.

Checking in with parishioners with a simple phone call or email will go a long way with many. This could come from the pastor or someone on staff - or even a parishioner. Consider recruiting a group of volunteers to help with outreach. This could also be an opportunity to ask your parishioners about their feelings related to in-person Mass and gather their prayer intentions. Here are sample tools to help:

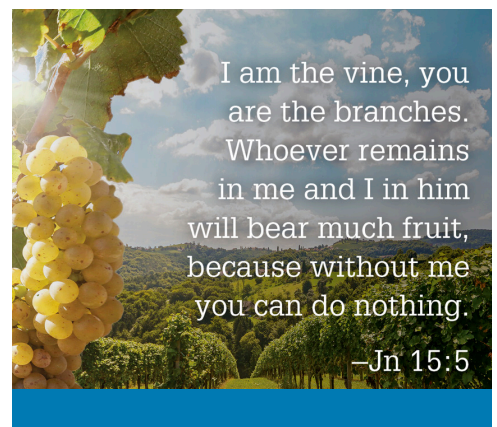
- **Phone script**
- **Pastor Check-in letter**

### MAKE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA SIZZLE

On average, parishes' page views during Covid-19 increased by 800 percent, and the number of followers for their Facebook pages went up almost 2,000 percent. Overall, parishes that post daily have 44% higher giving per household, according to researchers.

Running social media takes time and energy. We recommend developing a posting calendar that leverages content from key sources - in addition to new content that you're creating. Block off time to plan out your monthly content, create posts and schedule them to make sure your social presence is active and relevant. Keep in mind people love photos, inspirational messages and to hear from their pastor. Be sure to encourage engagement and ask your parishioners to like or comment on your posts. Here's a list of ideas to get you started:

- **Share short video message**, quote or link to blog from pastor
- **Share posts from Archbishop's blog**
- **Sunday Gospel Reflection**
- **Short videos of parishioners** sharing why they love attending mass in person
- **Saint of the Month**
- **Throwback Thursday** - Share old photos or historical facts about your parish
- **Promote upcoming parish events**
- **Share photos of staff and volunteers** with a THANK YOU! message
- **Highlight ministry activities**
- **Share photos of recent Sacraments**
- **Invite people to upcoming Masses** or special celebrations
- **Congratulate parishioners** on big life achievements



## ALSO PLAN TO SHARE POSTS FROM OTHER LOCAL CATHOLIC SOCIAL CHANNELS.

Be sure to follow @ArchdioceseofSeattle on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) for:

- Liturgical and seasonal posts
- Quotes from the Archbishop
- At Home with Faith inspirational series
- Upcoming liturgies and events
- Year of St. Joseph and Year of the Family inspiration
- Much, much more



Here is a set of sample welcome back messages that you can use when opening Mass, for your livestream, for your website, social media, bulletin, email news letter and more! Read Welcome Messages [here](#).

## PHASE 2: PLAN & PREPARE

### FOCUS YOUR EFFORTS

According to Barna, 32% of Christians stopped attending church during the pandemic. About 18% started online streaming from a different church and approximately 35% of Christians are streaming their pre-pandemic church.

Right now, every parish should focus on reaching out to the 35% of parishioners who are streaming Mass online. These are the parishioners who are engaged with your parish and will most likely be the first to begin participating in person.

Invite these parishioners directly to come celebrate Mass in-person. Here is a set of sample Welcome back messages that you can use when opening Mass, for your livestream, for your website, social media, bulletin, email newsletter and more! Read Welcome Messages [here](#).

### IT TAKES A TEAM!

Don't do this alone! Bring in your parishioners. Create a new hospitality group dedicated to helping engage parishioners during this time of the pandemic. Meet with them to share ideas, get feedback and develop a plan that will really work for YOUR parish. Key areas to discuss:

- What communication channels are in use now?
- Which are working?
- What could be improved?
- Are we reaching those parishioners without computers?
- How can we create a sense of or strengthen the community feeling of our parish?



## Here is a list of ideas that your hospitality taskforce may wish to explore.

### **SURVEY YOUR PARISH**

How do your parishioners feel about returning to in-person Mass? What challenges have they faced? What's keeping them from attending mass in person? What ideas do they have for your parish? Maybe you wish to propose a few ideas and have them vote on the ones that are most compelling for them?

The simple fact that you are sending a survey to parishioners to get their feedback demonstrates that their voice is important and that you're eager to hear from them. It's also a great way to get a sense of who is engaged with the parish right now and who isn't.

A survey can be created using a Google form or a tool like Survey Monkey. Once you've sent it out and gathered responses, we recommend sharing the highlights from the survey with your parishioners so they have a sense of how the parish is feeling overall.

### **BUILD THE CASE**

While some people have fallen out of the habit of in-person Sunday Mass, many others have lost sight of how receiving the Eucharist is the source and summit of our Catholic faith. This is an opportunity to remind them why we celebrate Mass and why receiving Jesus in the Eucharist is true food for our life as Catholics. Here are a few resources your parishioners may enjoy and are opportunities to watch together in person or virtually:

#### **Archbishop Etienne's Pastoral Letter**

In his Pastoral Letter, "The Work of Redemption: Eucharistic Belief and Practice in the Archdiocese of Seattle," Archbishop Etienne encourages us to grow our understanding and experience of the Eucharist. Available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Korean [here](#).

#### **Elements of the Catholic Mass**

This video series was produced by The Liturgical Institute. You may wish to feature one or all of the videos on your website. [Elements of the Catholic Mass - YouTube](#)

#### **Presence on [Formed.org](#)**

This series explores the truth and beauty of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, from its origins in Sacred Scripture, to its profound role in the life of the Church and her members. Many parishes have subscriptions to [Formed.org](#).

#### **Faith Formation Resources on Liturgy**

This website provides a series of videos and resources about liturgies and the Mass

Liturgy - [ARCHDIOCESE OF SEATTLE FAITH FORMATION ONLINE RESOURCES \(weebly.com\)](#)



## CREATE COMMUNITY

One of the reasons some people shared for not participating in an in-person celebration is because the lack of people feels a bit depressing. They miss the vibrancy of their community! This is an opportunity for you to create events that help bolster the community atmosphere. While we recommend virtual events, with the warmer summer months coming, can you host any of these events outside? Or do a hybrid of in person and virtual by livestreaming? Gathering outside is a great way to safely meet and begin to bring more people back to the parish campus.

### Coffee and Donuts

- If you have a big enough outdoor space, you can make coffee and donuts work after mass.
- For virtual coffee and donuts, it could be pre-recorded and posted, or live from the Facebook Page. Pastor or leader opens with a welcome, a prayer and shares a few thoughts about what's going on in the parish/community/world, etc. Variations of this could include 2 people having a discussion - or it could be opened up for people to post questions for a Q&A session.

### Bible Study

Host a weekly Bible Study if you have a big enough space, or host it virtually or hybrid, where you go deeper into one of the Gospel passages.

### Rosary

Host a weekly/monthly in-person or virtual Rosary led by different members of your parish. Recruit different parishioners to lead a decade of the rosary, which will encourage more participation.

### Book Club

- **Discuss the Pope's encyclicals** or recent books highlighted by the Catholic Review.
- **Keep it simple** by discussing sections or chapters every week or two.
- **Provide a few thought provoking questions** for people to think about ahead of time.
- **Enjoy the conversation!**
- **Promote the book and discussion on your website** and in the bulletin so people can read along.

### Small Group Fellowship

It may be worth creating smaller groups for prayer and fellowship. The group may wish to discuss the Sunday Gospel and reflect on how that impacts their current life situation. Suggestions include:

- **Golden Fellowship (for 55+)**
- **Young Adult (for 20-35)**
- **Mothers Group**
- **Fathers Group**
- **Young Couples Group**
- **Busy Professionals Group** (Perhaps this one meets bi-weekly instead of weekly!)



## Another great way to build community,

is to highlight the members of your community. Consider creating a campaign that highlights families, couples, and individuals. Ask people to send in a photo along with a quote, which you can feature on the website, the bulletin, and even on social media. Quotes could be about:

- Why they love your parish
- What being Catholic means to them
- How they live their Catholic faith
- Why they attend in-person Mass

## LEVERAGE ASSETS

We want to help elevate your work without making you work harder. One way to do that is to leverage materials and assets that already exist to regularly reach out to your parishioners. Here are a few recommended resources:

### Northwest Catholic stories

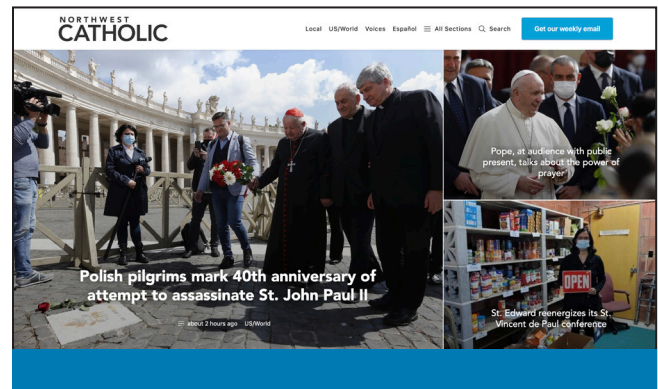
Did you know Northwest Catholic has an online edition? Sharing stories directly from [NWCatholic.org](http://NWCatholic.org) is a great way help your parishioners feel connected to other Catholics in Western Washington. Each week 1-3 local stories are posted online, along with news from the archdiocese, statements from the Bishops and news from around the world and from the Pope through Catholic News Service.

### Social media campaign

Here is a [list of social channels](#) from the Archdiocese including Archives, Archbishop Etienne, Hispanic Ministry, Vocations, CYO, Fulcrum, WSCC and much more!

### Come and Be Fed Video Series

Archbishop Etienne filmed three videos with young Catholics discussing the Eucharist. At the end of each video he invites people to return to Mass to receive Christ in the Real Presence. We encourage parishes to share these videos on their parish websites and push them out over social media. You can access the landing page here: [Be Fed | Archdiocese of Seattle \(archseattle.org\)](http://Be Fed | Archdiocese of Seattle (archseattle.org))



## SPECIAL EVENTS AND SERVICE OUTREACH IDEAS

During this pandemic, gathering large groups of people is challenging. We recommend focusing on outdoor events that create community and a sense of pride for your parish. Ideas include:

### Parish picnic

Please can bring their own food and blankets/chairs to sit on. This event should include a few fun activities for children like coloring, cupcake walk, lawn games, etc. Reach out to your parishioners to see what talent they can offer for this festival. Perhaps you have musicians who are willing to play music, an artist who is willing to paint the back of children's hands (instead of face painting), a local business owner who can donate popsicles or a popcorn machine. Overall, this would be a great way to gather your community together for fellowship and fun.

## Night of Reflection

Host an evening event to reflect on the last year during the pandemic. Include prayers for all those who are on the front lines, for those who are working to fight the pandemic, for those who died and for those who have lost a loved one. Recognize that everyone has been impacted in some way. This may include personal testimonies, passage reflections, personal prayer time and even a procession for people to drop in their prayer intentions for all the pray upon. Promote this event weeks in advance to help spread the word and make it clear that all are invited.

## Movie Nights

Invite parishioners for a movie night in the church or outdoors, such as Fatima, Babette's Feast, or the Witness to Love "Be Light" marriage renewal date-night series.

## Guest Speakers

Create a special event with a guest speaker who can engage parishioners with inspiring content.

## Faith Formation

Consider offering a free Year of the Eucharist webinar for adults based on Archbishop Etienne's Pastoral Letter. This webinar reflects on the meaning of the Eucharist for our daily living. Offered in English or Spanish at no cost to your parish. To schedule, contact Carlos Carillo at [carlos.carillo@seattlearch.org](mailto:carlos.carillo@seattlearch.org).

## Marriage & Family Life

Each of the following presentations engage parents as collaborators in forming their children in Religion, Morality and Catholic Identity Core Concepts for every grade level. To schedule please contact Deacon Eric Paige at [eric.paige@seattlearch.org](mailto:eric.paige@seattlearch.org).

- 1. Great Conversations:** Talking with your children about God's plan for love and marriage - Helps parents to address the challenges presented by technology, manage screen-time and grow closer with their children by deepening their relationship with God, school and parish community.
- 2. Made for Excellence:** Forming children for wisdom, justice, courage and self-control - Prepares parents to form their children in virtues they can apply in family and in school.
- 3. Do We Really Have to Go?** Why Going to Mass will change your life for the better - Renews parents' appreciation of the Mass and helps them make the experience better for their children.
- 4. Taming Technology:** Managing Screen Time by Making Space for God and Family - Provides the whys and hows to manage screens and technology in the home.
- 5. Known and Loved:** Dealing with the Hard Questions our Children Will Ask - Prepares parents for questions our children will ask about love and identity.
- 6. Finding Calm in the Storm:** Practical Ways to Find Peace at Home - Teaches proven practices from the Rule of St. Benedict to increase stability, balance and peace at home.



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## SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

### Parish Cleanup

Gather a group of parishioners who are willing to walk around your neighborhood and pick up trash. This is a great way to demonstrate Care for Creation.

### Host a food drive for St. Vincent de Paul

### CCS/CHS

Connect with your local CCS representative to see what necessities are most needed in your local area.

### One Parish One Prisoner Program

This re-entry model matches parishes with an incarcerated person for their mutual transformation and resurrection. Two-way trust is built via letter writing and prison visits. [Learn more here.](#)

### Ditty Bags

Create kits for seafarers coming into the Port of Seattle. These seafarers spend many lonely months at sea. The ministry is collecting ditty bags for them with donated knit stocking caps, hygiene items, religious materials, and other small articles. Learn more about this program and the [Seafarer Ministry here.](#)



## Smaller groups united by common experience or stage of life

Some of your efforts may be best spent focused on targeted groups within your parish. Be sure to include a member or two from that group in the planning process to ensure the tenor and goal of the event reflects the needs and feelings of that particular group. Below are a few examples of targeted activities:

### FOR THOSE WHO ARE GRIEVING

The pandemic changed life for many people, especially those who lost a loved one. Today's funerals, which are socially distanced with a limited number of people, look very different from our traditional community funeral experience. Graveside burials also have changes that limit the number of people who can participate. These changes have made it difficult for some to grieve.

We recommend hold a Memorial Prayer Service for all those who have lost loved ones in your community. Ask your parishioners to send in names and promote this event for at least a month to ensure people have time to prepare and invite others to join in. This event should be offered in-person as well as livestreamed. It may include a photo wall, or a procession for people to bring the name and place it in a basket.

### REACHING FAMILIES

Start making it clear to your parishioners that you are actively reaching out to families to make them feel welcome.

- **Check out the [Parenting Resources section](#)** of the new archdiocese website for more ideas and opportunities.
- **Share the weekly [At Home with Faith reflection](#)** for families available in English and Spanish. This content can go in your bulletin, on your website or in your social channels.



- **Consider starting small groups of families** with similar aged children and life stages.
- **Consider hosting a monthly Children’s Mass** where children are the lectors and families can attend without feeling pressured to keep little ones quiet. Here are some ways you can make families feel welcome at Mass:
- **Family greeters in the vestibule**
- **Start with a “bring the noise”** announcement that puts parents of young children at ease about their children making noise.
- **Provide a friendly “pew art”** card for parishes to put in pews so children have something to draw on.
- **Create a prayer intention card** so kids can write a prayer intention and drop it in the offertory.
- **Doughnuts!** Seriously, quality doughnuts are a motivator for children (and parents!)
- **Keep Mass as brief as is practical.** Children can only handle so much sitting still time.
- **A fun activity after Mass** - decorate advent wreaths, a flower for Mother’s Day, coloring pages, etc.



## REACHING TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

Covid has been especially isolating for teens and young adults. If you put a hold on your youth and young adult programs, this is the time to start them up again. If you don’t have the staff to do this, reach out to parishioners you think might be interested in helping start up a small group. [Formed.org](https://www.formed.org) has different series that could be the basis of discussion groups, or [YDisciple](#) and [Youth Alpha](#). Incorporating service projects is another way to engage teens and youth, and we suggest starting with Catholic organizations to keep the connection of faith through service. [Catholic Community Services](#) and [St. Vincent de Paul](#) are good options.

## REACHING THE ELDERLY AND HOMEBOUND

Engaging your parishioners to engage in your outreach to the elderly and homebound. This is an especially good opportunity for singles and empty nesters.

## OTHER WAYS TO WELCOME PEOPLE BACK

- **Print fliers to post locally** in the neighborhood at welcoming people to Mass.
- **Update your signage to read “Welcome Back to Mass** - Excited to see you in person!” (make sure you have parishioners prepared to welcome people at the door.)
- **Create a printed invitation** and mail it out to all parishioners inviting them to Mass.
- **Create your own video** showing people when they should expect when they come back for in-person Mass.
- **Take a look at what other thriving parishes are doing well.** Oscar Wilde said “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery...” Look at other parish websites, talk to their pastors or staff and see what’s working for them and if you think it’s worth trying at your parish.