

# **SENDING FAITH HOME**

**A GUIDE FOR  
CATECHETICAL LEADERS  
AMIDST THE  
CORONAVIRUS SHUTDOWN**



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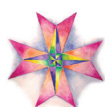
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**The Pastoral Center**

# 1 The Signs of the Times

## Taking Stock amidst Chaos

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Well, none of us signed up for this crisis, did we? Obviously, we are in unprecedented times in society and as a church, at least in our lifetimes (but this probably isn't the best time to start telling stories about the Black Plague).

First and foremost, we need to place our priorities on safety and caring for those who are most in need. As our leaders are telling us, social distancing is essential to slowing the spread of COVID-19 so people who are most at risk do not catch it. We need to reach out to those who are isolated, vulnerable, and scared, and we need pray for everyone involved, including public servants and health workers.

Even in the most difficult times, the Holy Spirit can break through and do something new and amazing. We may see it in new neighborhood connections that form, as a family shops for the elderly neighbor next door. We may see it in greater compassion for those on the margins of society, or in unexpected kindness in the aisles of an emptying grocery store.

While none of us would have wanted this crisis situation, I have to wonder if something new could break through in our parish families, who are being holed up in fear in a situation not entirely different from the disciples in the Upper Room 2,000 years ago.

Many of us have lamented how parents are not passing on faith to their own children, and how they rely too much on us as parish leaders to do it for them. Well, now we somehow find ourselves in a situation in which we *can't* do it for them, at least for a while. How might the Risen Christ enter through the locked doors and stir things up?

## First Things First

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The coronavirus situation requires some immediate attention. People are fearful, confused, and often cut off from their faith community. We have written two free, downloadable, bilingual handouts to offer guidance and reflections during this time:

- ▶ A Faith Response to the Coronavirus
- ▶ Faith-fully Navigating Coronavirus with Your Kids

If you haven't already, we recommend that you make these available to your people as a first step.

Find these free resources at <http://bit.ly/faith-coronavirus> and help us spread the word about them!

## Shelter in Place

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I am writing right now from my home office in the San Francisco Bay Area, in the Oakland Diocese, where a shelter-in-place order has been declared starting at midnight tonight. Residents are urged to stay in their homes—except for visits to grocery stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, and banks—through at least April 7.

Situations may vary, and the circumstances are changing fast. If you are not already experiencing cancellations of schools, Masses, and religious education programs, they may be headed your way soon.

## The View from Home

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So what is the situation in the homes of our parish families? Pretty bonkers, from what we've heard.

- ▶ Some parents are trying to somehow work from home, while others are without work (for at least a time). Still others, such as those in the medical field, are trying to arrange for childcare so they can work outside the home.
- ▶ Some schools are sending home classwork to be completed at home, but teachers are throwing things together on the fly. Some parents are going into full homeschooling mode, while others are trying to juggle supervision with their work.
- ▶ Cooped up at home, some of the kids are bouncing off the walls, while parents try to cope. Some parents are setting schedules to try to provide some structure and reduce the chaos. Some have given up hope for this.
- ▶ Many parents are anxious about shopping, putting food on the table, keeping their kids' hands clean, and just getting through to tomorrow.
- ▶ Without access to Mass or religious education, many parents have no idea what they should be doing with their kids right now regarding their faith.

## Getting Serious about the Domestic Church

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The church teaches us that the family is the "domestic church," a cell that makes up the larger church. The family is almost like a miniature parish. We never imagined it coming to this, but we're about to test out this model. Many of our families are now on their own, except for whatever support or guidance we can offer online, by phone, or through postal mail.

But there is a silver lining here. We have been forced into a situation where we need to coach and empower these parents to share faith with their own kids, or else it's not going to happen at all.

The classroom and textbook model wasn't working very well for us anyway, was it? We've been seeing generations of young Catholics dropping out of the church.

The studies that we commissioned to find out why this was happening have told us that what matters most is the role parents play in talking about and prioritizing the faith.

It turns out that our theology is right: parents are the primary teachers of their own children, whether we like it or not. However good we are as catechists, we will always be substitutes.

So let's get coaching!

## 2 Coaching Parents from a Distance

### Partnering with Parents

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As you may know, coaching parents is the central focus of our Growing Up Catholic ministry. I regularly speak about the topic at conferences like the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress and diocesan events. We are constantly creating resources to equip leaders like you to be a good coach.

For a more comprehensive introduction to a whole family approach, see our free *Why Coach Parents? Resource Kit* and other getting started tools at <https://pastoral.center/family-catechesis-planning>

We talk about three methods of partnering with parents: through whole family catechesis events (in-parish events where parents and their kids work together in the same room), parent sessions (in-parish events where parents gather together with their kids elsewhere), and send-home resources. We put most of our emphasis on the first two options, when we can coach in-person.

There's a reason for that, and I'm not going to lie about it. It is *very difficult* to motivate parents to take action at home. Families have overbooked schedules and so many distractions. It's also difficult to coach someone from afar. So we usually only recommend using send-home resources to reinforce what is already being done in the parish.

### What's My Motivation?

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We find ourselves in a situation that we haven't been in before, so let's think things through a bit.

As church leaders, we may be concerned that children will not be experiencing faith formation for an extended period of time (only God knows when things will return to normal). We may also be concerned that families are unable to attend Mass.

Are most parents as concerned as we are about this? It's unlikely. We have a hard enough time getting some of them to Mass or religious education when the parish is open! Plus, they have more immediate concerns, like figuring out how to occupy Timmy before he starts jumping on the couch and knocks over the lamp again.

Sometimes we try to force or guilt families to come to class or Mass, but that's definitely not going to work in this situation. The parents will need to *want* to do this.

## What Do Parents Need Right Now?

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We have a very unique opportunity here. We have a bunch of bored kids stuck at home with parents who don't know what to do with them. If we could give them some fun, interesting, meaningful faith-based activities, I think we have a decent chance of some families using them.

They can't be just *any* resources. They need to be:

- ▶ **Downloadable/online.** Hopefully you have email addresses for your families, because that is likely your best mechanism for regularly delivering resources to parents. You could send a postal mailing that requests email addresses, but sending resources that way is time-consuming and expensive. Email communication will also give you the ability to prompt parents proactively. Relying on them to take the initiative to check your parish website will not be effective.
- ▶ **Engaging and fun.** You will need to convince parents that the activity will be worthwhile, and if it's not, you probably will not get a second chance. They don't have to do this, and they won't unless it serves them well. We need to think more like Vacation Bible School than math class.
- ▶ **Easy to follow.** Parents don't have time to do much preparation, and they will not have the concentration to follow complex instructions. Ideally, it will include simple, step-by-step instructions that guide them through. We also have to be realistic about what materials they will have available at home.
- ▶ **Relational.** The whole point of bringing faith into the home is to evangelize, so that all family members are being brought closer to Christ and the church. And the best way to make sure faith is passed on to younger generations is to encourage *faith conversation* between parents and their children.

## Shifting Our Role

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As the parent shifts into the role of catechist, we shift into the role of coach. This means we will need to develop some new skills and set some new priorities.

In this particular situation—from a distance—we need to become curators of activities that parents can use. Parents don't have time to scour the internet for their own activities, so make it as easy as possible for them. It's fine to point to helpful websites for those with a little extra motivation, but parents will appreciate specific recommendations. We need to offer various options that will serve different ages and learning styles.

We also need to be *influencers* and *motivators*, getting parents excited about what's in it for them and helping them believe that they can do it. I know you may not have gotten into this ministry to be a salesperson, but that's a lot of what evangelization comes down to.

# 3 At-Home Activities

## Growing Up Catholic

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If we're going to send resources home, we don't have a lot of time to put them together. We need to send them home now.

You can browse all of the resources in this family at <https://pastoral.center/growing-up-catholic-library>

Well, you're in luck! Our Growing Up Catholic family of resources was designed to coach parents to pass on faith to their children through an activity-based approach, and they are almost all downloadable & reproducible (some have an option to buy as paperback with free downloads). We generally charge a reasonable lifetime flat license fee per resource, which allows your parish or school to share them with an unlimited number of families.

You don't have to use our resources, but you can at least find inspiration from them. Some were designed specifically for use in a parish whole family catechesis setting, with parents working through the activities with their children, so they're a great option to send home. Some will require some adaptation or explanation in order to send them home.

## PDF Tools

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One technical tool that you may want to have at your disposal is a simple PDF editor. Most downloadable resources that are designed for printing are made available in PDF format. Usually you would print just the pages you need, but you may want to send only certain pages home to parents. In that case, you can use a tool to either "extract" only the pages you want (creating a new PDF file) or copy the original file and delete all other pages.

A number of free PDF editing tools are available online. Some allow you to edit a PDF file through your web browser, while others are desktop applications. Try searching for "free pdf editor" to find some options. If you need help figuring this out, check in with someone at your parish who is more technically savvy.

## An Example: St. Patrick Activities

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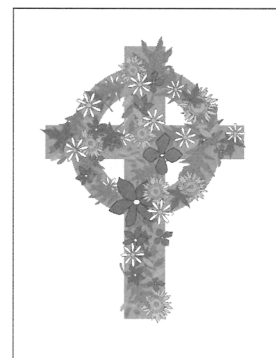
The month of March is the perfect time to celebrate and learn about St. Patrick, and we have the perfect tool to do so. *Experience the Saints* is a downloadable activity-based resource. It comes in four volumes, each with three saints. It includes eight activities per saint, each based on a different learning intelligence. It comes with step-by-step handouts written for parents to follow. While not all activities may be good options to send home or specific ages, you have plenty to choose from.

You can preview pages from this resource, learn more, and purchase at <https://pastoral.center/experience-the-saints-1>



In addition to the biography and overview, here are the eight activities:

- ▶ **"Ask, Seek, Knock" Action Story** - By re-telling a Bible story (Luke 11:9-13) through rhyme and motions, participants will understand the importance that Jesus, as well as Patrick, placed on the power of persistent prayer.
- ▶ **"I'm Going to Ireland" Game / Shamrocks & Snakes Gummi Snacks** - By working together, participants will relate events from Patrick's life through a cooperative game and enjoy a gelatin snack to celebrate their achievements.
- ▶ **Stitched Book of Prayers** - By compiling a handmade book, participants will reflect on the prayers of Saint Patrick.
- ▶ **Trinity Symbol Triptych** - By following directions to select and organize images in a triptych, participants will demonstrate their understanding of Saint Patrick's teachings on the Trinity.
- ▶ **"Prayer for Peace" Sign & Song** - By learning and performing rhythmic movements to David Haas's "Prayer for Peace," participants will further appreciate and interpret the meaning of "The Breastplate of Saint Patrick."
- ▶ **Celtic Cross Solar Print** - By using elements found in nature to develop a symbolic picture, participants will recreate Saint Patrick's methods for sharing the Christian message.
- ▶ **First Person Minstrel Story** -By experiencing a first person narrative, participants will learn biographical information regarding Saint Patrick and connect the events of his life to a related Bible story (Luke 11:9-13), and to the importance of prayer.
- ▶ **Metal-Tooled Celtic Cross** - Through the creation of a metal-tooled, Celtic cross, the participants will associate the shape with the meaning of the traditional Irish symbol. They will also make further connections by relating the Celtic cross to Patrick's religious teachings.



These seem like the right kinds of activities to equip parents with so that they can occupy their bored kids and bring faith to the forefront. They may not all be perfect, but some make speak more to certain families or age levels. The resource weaves conversation points through the activities, so that there's a chance for families to talk through the faith meaning behind the actions.

Some of the crafts in this series are rather advanced, which has its pros and cons. On the one hand, they are more complex, requiring preparation and sometimes uncommon supplies. On the other hand, when the crafts are a step or two above black line masters, that makes them more engaging and interesting. And some handy (and bored) parents may be more inclined to get into these activities if there is some small way that a power tool could be involved. We have listed options for simplification where possible.

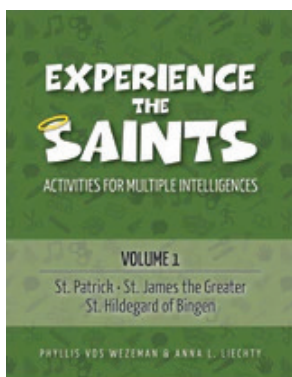


## Downloadable Resource Options

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Below we've listed some top options from our Growing Up Catholic catechetical library (<https://pastoral.center/growing-up-catholic-library>). All are downloadable and sharable. All are based on short activities that parents can teach themselves. All are sold with a lifetime parish license. All are delivered by email within the day of your order. All are organized and ready to go!

Extensive online previews are available for each resource. Just follow the link under each title.



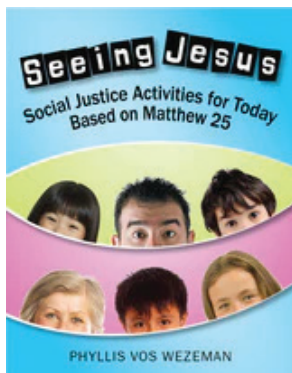
### **Experience the Saints: Activities for Multiple Intelligences** (4 volumes)

<https://pastoral.center/experience-the-saints>

Sold in four volumes, with three saints per volume. Eight activities provided per saint (one for each learning intelligence).

Includes step-by-step parent instruction sheets. You may need to provide extra coaching to parents for setup, as it assumes leaders will do preparation for using these in a parish session.

Each volume costs only \$14/parish. All four volumes are \$42/parish.

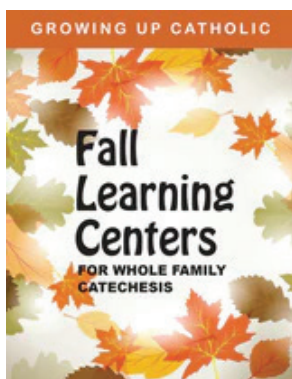


### **Seeing Jesus: Social Justice Activities for Today Based on Matthew 25**

<https://pastoral.center/seeing-jesus-eresource>

Sixty learning activities focused on serving those in need. Includes reproducible handouts and general instruction sheets. Some instructions will assume a group setting or single instructor, but can easily be adapted. The learning extends into a broader exploration of social issues, as found in Matthew 25.

Download costs \$24/parish. Download + Paperback costs \$29.70.

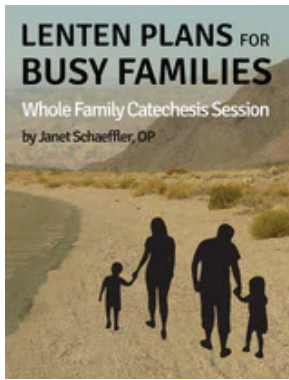


### **Fall Learning Centers for Whole Family Catechesis** (in English & Spanish)

<https://pastoral.center/fall-learning-centers-for-whole-family-catechesis-eresource>

While designed for use in the fall months, the content is fairly general purpose. The resource provides three sessions, with seven activities each. One set of activities is on Mary the Mother of God, one on "Living the Beatitudes," and one on giving thanks to God. Includes step-by-step parent instruction sheets.

Download costs \$14/parish/language.

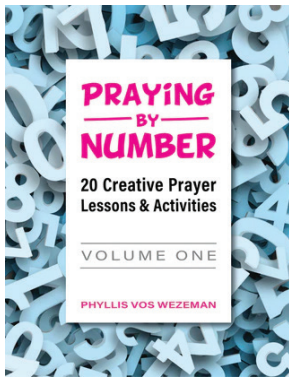


### **Lenten Plans for Busy Families**

<https://pastoral.center/lenten-plans-for-busy-families>

Designed for use at the beginning of Lent, it is a great way to help families focus on the season at home. In addition to introductory talking points, it includes four activities. Includes step-by-step parent instruction sheets.

Download costs \$15/parish/language.



### **Praying by Number: Creative Prayer Lessons & Activities (2 volumes)**

<https://pastoral.center/praying-by-number>

Forty learning activities focused on prayer, spread across two volumes. Each activity is somehow themed based on the chapter number. Includes reproducible handouts and general instruction sheets. Some instructions will assume a group setting or single instructor, but can easily be adapted.

Download costs \$16/parish/volume. Download + Paperback costs \$21.60/volume.

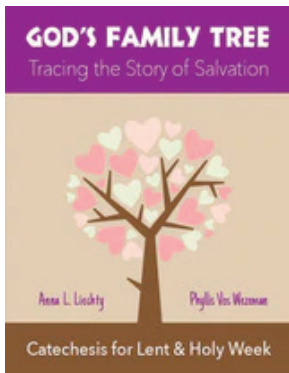


### **Know Chocolate for Lent: Formation for Kids & Families**

<https://pastoral.center/know-chocolate-for-lent-kids>

This resource uses the growing and manufacturing process of chocolate as a metaphor for the growth of faith and discipleship in the Christian life while guiding participants through Lent, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. It is organized by the week, but families could play a bit of catch up. It may take a bit of extra adaptation, but it is an engaging approach that will grab families' attention.

Download costs \$18/parish.



### **God's Family Tree: Catechesis for Lent & Holy Week**

<https://pastoral.center/gods-family-tree>

This resource teaches the story of salvation through Lent and Holy Week. It is organized by the week, but families could play a bit of catch up. It may take a bit of extra adaptation, but it is an engaging approach that will grab families' attention.

Download costs \$18/parish.

## Guidelines for Using Downloadable Tools

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Whether you use one of our resources or other activities in your toolbox or from a favorite website, here are some tips and recommendations for making them useful for parents at home.

- ▶ **Make it easy and clear.** Do as much work as you can to smooth the way for parents. If possible, create pages with numbered steps as if it is a recipe.
- ▶ **Make it active.** Yes, you can point families to online videos that teach aspects of the faith, but parents will probably leave the room and it will put children in a passive role. That's fine as far as it goes, but it is not whole family catechesis, and it will have a limited effect in truly passing on the faith. What we most want is for both children and parents to be in active roles, having meaningful conversations. You may have to add in some of those conversation prompts.
- ▶ **Don't overwhelm parents.** It will be a challenge to deliver the right amount of content, as some families will be lucky to do one activity, while others may be desperately looking for activities to fill their days. Find a way to "stage" your offerings so you can serve them all. Perhaps you can identify an option for "if you can only do one activity/session this week." Offer additional options for those looking for something more. But offer parents a *prioritized* list with your best idea on top.
- ▶ **Ask and listen.** We will need to be humble and admit this is uncharted territory for all of us. We need to check in with parents to learn what is most helpful to them. Be available to listen and learn what they need. They are the catechists. The insights we gain from this time could turn out to be incredibly helpful for our ministries in the long run!

## More Resources for Online Faith Formation

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- ▶ **John Roberto of Vibrant Faith** offers a helpful document on "Moving Faith Formation Online" at <http://bit.ly/moving-faith-formation-online>.
- ▶ The **Strong Catholic Family Faith website**, sponsored by the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL) is a great resource with many tools: <http://catholicfamilyfaith.org>

# 4 Sunday Worship

## When We Can't Gather to Worship Together

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As so many dioceses have had to cancel Sunday Masses, we have been caught off guard as a church. What should families do instead? We need to give our people some guidance. To be honest, I'm not sure exactly what to recommend at this point, but here are some thoughts on the matter.

One thing is for sure: we need to be creative, like the Italian priest who asked his parishioners to email him selfies, which he printed out and taped to the pews, so he wouldn't be so lonely when presiding. See video at <http://bit.ly/mass-selfies>.

## Live Streaming

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Some parishes already provide video streams to their Sunday Masses, and others are scrambling to do so now. While there is something to say for the solidarity of the common experience and access to local preaching, I'm not sure how possible it is to actively and consciously participate remotely, through a screen. Is it still the "work of the people"? We are a sacramental people who experience the faith through the physical world and our senses. The Mass is a dialogue. It is the physical presence of the Body of Christ. At least that's the soapbox that the liturgist in me wants to stand on.

Aside from theological concerns, there are technological challenges, both on the parish side and in homes that may not have reliable internet access.

For families with children, streaming Mass will likely be an underwhelming experience. It can be challenging enough to keep children engaged in the liturgy when we are physically present.

## Home Services

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While we can't celebrate our own Masses at home (unless you're boarding a priest), families can certainly pray together.

The official guidelines in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* provide Liturgy of the Hours (morning or evening) or a Liturgy of the Word service. Diana Macalintal is graciously offering free Liturgy of the Hour scripts with instructions at <http://bit.ly/sunday-liturgy-hours>. However, families are not bound to these forms.

One problem is that these services may be challenging for families, many of whom are used to a more age-appropriate Children's Liturgy of the Word service. We are not aware of options that make it easy for parents to create this kind of experience in their homes, but are considering if this is something we can create.



## Breaking Open the Word

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Whether or not families or individuals participate in a Sunday service, they can reflect together on the Sunday readings.

We have made six of our downloadable lectionary-based resources available for free through Easter Sunday to make this easier for families, in our *Faith@Home Lectionary eResource Bundle*. It includes:

- ▶ **Word of the Week:** One-Page Bulletin Inserts with Cartoons, Reflections, and Questions of the Week • These handouts combine insights on the Sunday readings, a cartoon from *The Sunday Flock*, and reflection questions. This is a great general purpose tool for encouraging families to reflect on the readings, and the cartoon will especially help draw them in.
- ▶ **Breaking Open the Word:** A Simple Yet Powerful Two-Page Process • These handouts offer a helpful structure for reflecting on the Sunday readings, based on the same reflections found in *Word of the Week*. It is structured for group use, with opening and closing prayer and reflection questions.
- ▶ **Bringing Home the Gospel:** Reflections and Questions for Busy Parents • These handouts are designed for busy parents who want to share the faith with their family and reflect on their spiritual journey. The thoughtful, relevant reflections are followed by a "personal response" question for parents and a "Family Response" question for the whole family.
- ▶ **The Hands-On Gospel:** Thought-Provoking Demonstrations of the Sunday Gospels • This resource offers a creative demonstration to accompany the week's Gospel reading and kick-off conversation—perfect for parents to lead Children's Liturgy of the Word sessions in their own home. The physical experiments and demonstrations will captivate children and focus them on a key aspect of the Scripture reading. The materials for the first week may be challenging for parents to gather, but the other weeks are easier.
- ▶ **Mass Transit Cards:** Lectionary-based Conversation Starters for Families (English & Spanish) • Each card includes a key quotation from one of the readings, a family-friendly reflection, a one or two-sentence prayer, and a reflection question. We have included all cards through May 24.
- ▶ **The Gospel Stories of Jesus:** A Creative Retelling of the Sunday Gospel Readings (English & Spanish) • In this resource, Deacon Dick Folger retells the Gospels in a fresh story form—bringing out a full sensory experience—followed by a short reflection.

You can request the free bundle at <https://pastoral.center/faith-at-home-bundle>.

Fr. James Martin, S.J., offers his own list of options for how to reflect on the readings at home at <http://bit.ly/sunday-without-mass>.

# 5 Other Adult Formation

## Spiritual Care for Afar

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Just as we can serve families by curating activities for them, we can provide spiritual support for adults in our parish.

While we won't go into detail about them here, we have a large number of downloadable eResources for adults, as well. You can browse them all at <https://pastoral.center/eresources>.

In particular, you can find:

- ▶ Lenten downloads: <https://pastoral.center/lenten-eresources>
- ▶ All adult formation: <https://pastoral.center/eresources-adult-faith-formation>
- ▶ Retreats: <https://pastoral.center/eresources-retreat>
- ▶ Small group resources: <https://pastoral.center/small-group-eresources>

## Gathering Online

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One particular need for many adults at this time is to keep connected during this time of isolation. Technology can easily make this possible, and your parishioners may be eager to make the arrangements for themselves if you suggest it and provide a strong downloadable resource. Participants could gather via Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, or other video or audio conferencing tools. Consider how you can keep community strong across a distance.

# 6 Serving Others

## Loving Our Neighbor

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While we are hunkered down in our homes, we shouldn't forget that we are still called to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This can be a particular challenge when authorities are telling us not to leave our homes except when necessary, but it is not impossible. As leaders, we can invite families to creatively reach out.

Here is a bit of brainstorming to get you started:

- ▶ Offer to shop or do other jobs for those who are most vulnerable to the virus, so they don't have to unnecessarily expose themselves. We can also make ourselves available for any other ways that they need help.
- ▶ Be reasonable in our purchasing decisions so that there will be enough supplies for everyone.
- ▶ Help those who work in "essential services" such as medical care with child-care, shopping, or other tasks.
- ▶ Regularly pray for those who are sick, lonely, isolated, overburdened, and scared.

## Identify Those in Need

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Coach your parishioners on how to get in touch with those who need help. You may also be able to facilitate connections through your parish connections.

- ▶ Reach out to neighbors in need through neighborhood communities such as NextDoor, asking them to get in touch with anything they need help with.
- ▶ The elderly, homebound and, those who are medically vulnerable may all need help or simply feel isolated and lonely. Find contact information for those who are visited by eucharistic ministers to the sick and make sure they are called regularly. You could also reach out through your parish email list for those who could use help. Perhaps the parish could coordinate a phone tree.
- ▶ Remind parishioners to call family members who may be alone, even if they live far away.
- ▶ Pay attention to any needs from the larger community that your parishioners could fulfill. Is the local food bank staffed? Are there immediate financial needs that the parish community could meet?



## **7** The Road Ahead

It seems that we are at the beginning of an extended period of who-knows-what. As always, we are called to keep our eyes fixed on Christ. We ask that you be patient with us as we stumble forward and try to help you through our ministry.

Please also remember the importance of self-care. Be present to your own needs as you minister to others. Thank you for all that you do to serve the People of God, the Body of Christ, wherever they may be!