

A Parish Responds to COVID-19

By Liese Peterson



Like many, our small rural parish is in a diocese which also contains many large, urban and affluent churches. As a result, we're often "on our own" when it comes to creative solutions that are accessible and affordable. And while members of parishes in most places do have access to streaming Masses and other services, many rural parish members are less inclined to take part in Zoom meetings or fire up a parish's YouTube channel. For these reasons, I've polled some of my friends in neighboring parishes, as well as the leaders in our parish, and we've collected some super ideas which nearly anyone can implement. Here are some delightful, real-life and successful ideas for you and your families to try:

EACH ONE TEACH ONE

Faith Formation and RCIA

Here in the Diocese of Las Vegas, children and teens are not allowed to attend school in person and so must do so remotely. Faith Formation classes began this fall, and at least in our parish, they

are held in the parish hall while observing proper distancing and the wearing of masks.

However, drawing on the history and philosophy of many Christian missionaries, some Faith Formation leaders are calling on their students to par-

ticipate in short weekly "each one, teach one" messages, where a child in one grade is responsible for phoning or texting a child two grades lower (or speaking to him/her personally, if possible) to convey a simple teaching. Faith Formation leaders are providing

these one- or two-sentence messages to students on index cards, which might read (for younger students): “Jesus said, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’” or for older students, “Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life, those who believe in Me shall not perish but have eternal life.’” Faith Formation gives out modest awards (printed certificates) to students who do this five or ten times in consecutive weeks. RCIA students are receiving much more sophisticated and complex messages from former RCIA students, too, usually delivered by phone or text.

EACH ONE REACH ONE

Confirmation students

In some parishes, it’s traditional that confirmation students are required to do some sort of parish service as part of their preparation for confirmation. In my parish, the confirmation students bus dishes at Knights of Columbus fish fries and act as ushers, as well as find other ways to serve our community. Now, some confirmation students are personally reaching out to their “social buddies,” who are people assigned to them for a phone call three times a week to check on their social welfare and provide some levity during the quarantine. This is a great way to foster relationships between generations, a great way to foster greater empathy, and a means to help each other with technology.

Incidentally, one faith formation leader has challenged all the

confirmation students to teach at least five senior citizens how to use their laptops and phones more fully. Recent research shows that senior citizens would love to use FaceTime, Zoom, or WhatsApp, but have no idea how to do so. Helping them learn new technology gives the seniors new social avenues and teaches the confirmation students patience!

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY ZOOM MEETINGS

Our parish has a prayer shawl ministry, and we recently learned that another parish holds once a week “knitting circles” where the members can get together on Zoom or Skype to pray and chat while knitting or crocheting. My contact at the other parish mentioned that they have an individual in their group who is a member of the choir who sometimes leads them in singing while they’re making shawls. They have also asked one member to play a specific artist’s music on the YouTube channel as they work.

DRIVE-UP FISH FRY

Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus hold a fish fry in our community which is hugely popular and a great fundraiser for our parish. Unfortunately, we are prevented from holding large gatherings in the hall, so our Knights recruited some help from the parish, such as the Ladies’ Auxiliary and confirmation students, to serve food to the public on a drive-up basis in the parking lot. The response

has been tremendous. People may order and pay online, or they may order onsite and pay, then pull into a parking spot and wait for their food to be delivered.

VIRTUAL CHOIR

Music ministry

In our parish, we are only allowed one person as a singer, accompanied by a musician. However, those attending Mass may sing, which isn’t easy as our hymnals were removed for the sake of keeping the church clean. As the music director at our church, I have asked choir members to let me know when they’re able to attend Mass in person and then I let them know the song selections for the Mass. This way, they can prepare in advance to sing along by bringing their own song sheets or hymnals, which makes for a much richer liturgy.

We’ve found that many of us are drawing on our school experiences, or our own “pre-technology” experiences as teachers and parents to link the generations together, keep people from feeling isolated, share Christ’s love and still be respectful of the necessary guidelines.

Please share your ideas with Catholic Rural Life Magazine (Annie@CatholicRuralLife.org) so that we can all achieve love and kindness despite the pandemic!