



Networked parishes

Ideas from parishes for pastoral care and mission during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond



Parishes in our diocese are finding creative ways to care for the vulnerable and help parishioners keep in touch with each other, both online and offline.

Here are some of the ideas parish priests and administrators shared in a survey in April 2020. If your parish is doing something others could learn from [let us know](#) and we'll pass it on.

Social media and teleconferencing

To follow up on anything here, contact **Paul Bodenham**
Programme Leader for Social Action, Diocese of Nottingham:
email caritas@dioceseofnottingham.uk or call 07470 907656

St Mary's Parish in Loughborough and St Joseph's in Leicester have both set up a private **interactive Facebook Group** which parishioners can ask to join. At St Mary's the parish priest uses the Facebook Group to send messages to the parishioners, and parishioners exchange requests for help, ideas for growing in faith, and even some music and crafts.

St Joseph's, like many parishes, also has a **Facebook Page** which allows a parish a [public presence](#) where people can submit comments and contact the parish. Both parishes find that Facebook Pages and Groups have to be administered by someone literate in the many security options available

Many parishes have set up a **WhatsApp** Group. St Joseph's have developed a useful [consent form](#) which you might find helpful, if yours is one of the many who have said they'd like to set up a WhatsApp Group.

Bishop Patrick has written to parish priests and administrators to thank them for all they are doing to keep in contact with parishioners during the pandemic. And his letter looks to the future: 'We can learn lessons from our current experience in lockdown', he says, 'to help us to be more creative in our ways of communication as a diocese going forward'.

Catherine Brady, a parishioner at St Mary's, Loughborough, has written about new 'ways of being Church' which have emerged during lockdown in her parish, in [this thoughtful reflection on the Diocesan website](#). Having run a 'Grub Club' to feed children during the school holidays, the people of the parish are continuing to deliver financial help to families every fortnight. And one parishioner confessed that their son 'watches Mass on a phone in his room, appreciating the fact that [for now!] he doesn't have to get up early'.

Crowdcast, and the parish's RCIA group has also met by Skype. The parish plans to 'use interactive platforms, such as Zoom, to bring the faithful together in prayer groups', and is developing a 'programme of catechesis and faith formation using interactive platforms, in the hope of offering a range of options for faith development'. They are even considering a quiz night in the coming weeks.

The **Justice and Peace** Commission has an [interactive Facebook Group](#) in which members explore how to live the Gospel through in today's world – you are very welcome to join us in it. And we can tell you about online discussions which bring Christians together to learn from the pandemic, such as [Radical Presence](#).

Not everyone is able to benefit from video-conferencing and social media. Overleaf are some ways parishes have used to keep in touch by post and telephone.

Other parishes are considering using Zoom for an occasional '**Compline and Chat**', **prayer meetings** and a **Rosary group**.

Parishioners at the Cathedral in Nottingham and at Holy Cross, Leicester meet up with each other for **coffee and chat** using the Zoom video-conferencing facility after the Sunday morning livestreamed Mass. And at St Anne's, Buxton, the Facebook feed is left open after each live-streamed Sunday Mass so that people can chat in their '**virtual parish hall**'. All Saints, Hassop even manages a choir practice by Zoom!

To bring ideas like these together, Holy Cross, Leicester has published a comprehensive **Covid-19 pastoral plan**, which covers [prayer, study, community and mission](#). There is a [weekly scripture study group](#) for parishioners via



Video or telephone conferencing enables clergy and parishioners to get together for business meetings, such as Parish Council or Deanery Meetings, as well as for liturgy and discussion. We are happy to offer your parish a demonstration of **Zoom** (a facility for video and audio conferencing) and **Whypay** (a free telephone conferencing service). Feel free to [contact us](#) to find out more.

Reaching those not on the internet

Several parishes post a **printed newsletter** out each week to parishioners who can't access it online. (Some have found they have to 'phone first to gain the individual's consent). At St Joseph's in Leicester a prayer card or leaflet from the [Watermead Apostolate](#) is often posted with the newsletter.

In many places the **parish SVP conference** and **Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion** keep up postal and telephone communications with vulnerable parishioners. For ideas on organising your parish's pastoral care network during the pandemic, take a look at [this useful guide published by CSAN and SVP](#).

At Holy Spirit, West Bridgford, members of the youth group have delivered **handmade cards** to housebound parishioners, which were received with delight.

Holy Trinity in Grimsby, Cleethorpes and Immingham have established a **Parish Media Team** to 'ensure that live streams happen and are accessible and people receive the appropriate online information.'

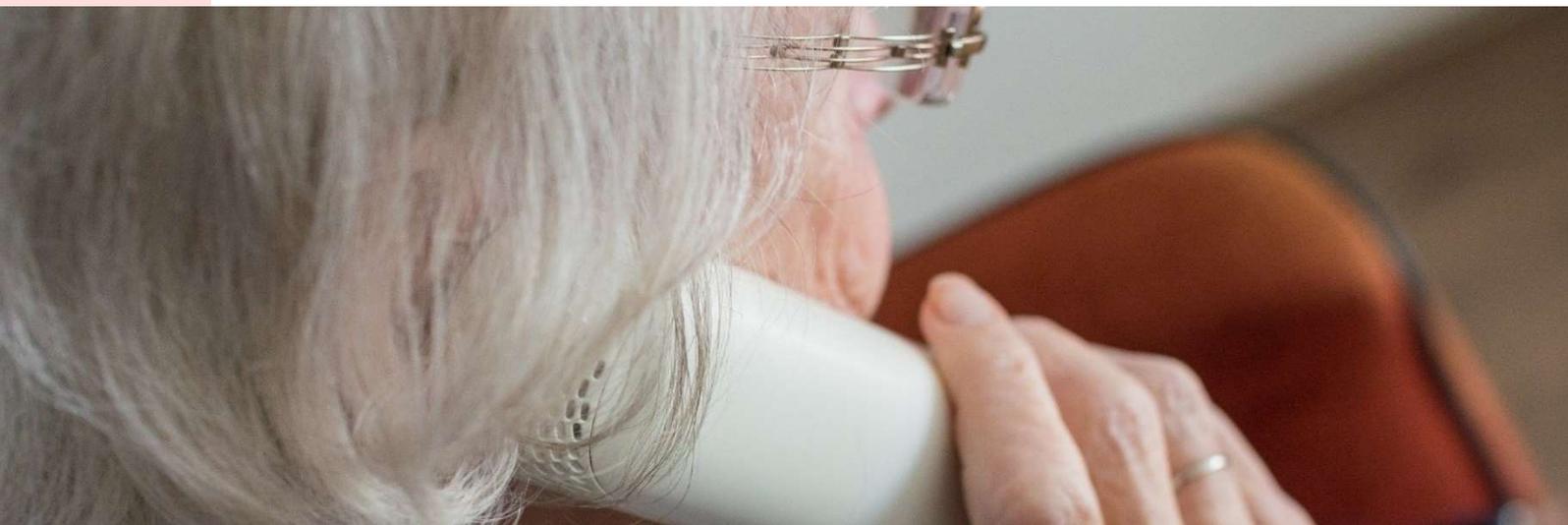
Several parishes which have a **telephone tree** for keeping in touch with parishioners. At St Alban's in Derby it's backed up by parishioners out on their daily exercise, who drop off the parish newsletter and a DVD of Sunday Mass. The parish has organised help for vulnerable parishioners to get online or use a DVD Player.

St Dominic's Community in Hinckley, with Earl Shilton & Market Bosworth, offer an **audio Mass by telephone**. People who only have a telephone can dial in and hear the audio of the Mass in Hinckley every Sunday at 10.00 a.m.

There are plenty of Catholics around with IT skills, but they are not evenly spread. So we have established a [Virtual Volunteer Bureau](#). If you have even basic skills in social media or video-conferencing, and are willing to share them, please [introduce yourself!](#)

One deacon tells us:

"A significant number [of our parishioners] are 'locked down' for their own health reasons ... Maintaining face to face contact with these folk is often impossible as they have no IT facilities and no intention of obtaining them. Telephone and hard copy publications are their only means of contact with their Church."



is best to check regularly what kind of donations the food bank needs. As a gift to the wider community Holy Trinity, Holbeach has published a **useful list of essential services on the parish website**, such as meals-on-wheels, taxis and farmshop deliveries.

Within the congregation, a **parish pastoral care network** can co-ordinate everyone involved in looking after vulnerable parishioners. In trying to reach them, several parishes have found that their database is out of date. Some are planning to undertake a **new parish census** when restrictions are lifted. If you're planning to renew your census, it's a good idea to include a **skills audit** to capture parishioners' gifts and interests.

Looking to the future, it is not too soon to be thinking of the parish's **mission after the pandemic**. We will be emerging from lockdown into a wounded world. 2021 will be a year to bring the parish back together, remember what people valued in the parish beforehand, share what we have learnt (as individuals and as a parish), and hear how God is calling us afresh. It will be a year to be renewed in 'encounter, discipleship and mission', the three themes which guide us as a diocese.



One parish priest tells us:

"The problem, inevitably, is for those who are not on the radar for the informal network of (largely phone) contacts across the parish. There is no apparent means of identifying them, since the only likely point of identity is their presence at weekend Masses."

The **Diocese is joining Caritas** at just the right time. Caritas is the Church's worldwide network for charitable outreach and social action, and **every parish is invited**. To help launch a **journey out of lockdown with Caritas** for your parish we'd like to propose a programme called **Here: Now: Us**. It explores how Catholic Social Teaching can help build the common good, particularly as society recovers from the pandemic. It help your parish value the gifts and skills of lay people, and grow as a confident, outward-looking community in a wounded world.

Finally, good communications make a huge difference during the current restrictions – but it is a challenge to get them going and keep them going. As long ago as the diocesan Assembly in 2003 communications were identified as something we all have to work on. It would be helpful if every parish had a designated **communications assistant** to help with social media and IT, both during the pandemic and beyond. Most parishes responding to the recent survey said they would like to appoint one. Please **let us know** the contact details of yours, so that we can include them in the circulation of diocesan communications.

For more information and ideas about responding to the pandemic and its aftermath, visit the Covid-19 section of the diocesan website at dioceseofnottingham.uk/covid-19-guidelines-and-information

With thanks to all whose contributions made this guidance possible.