



Community Accompaniment During COVID-19

During these unprecedented times, we as the Church in the Archdiocese of Chicago want to make sure that our most vulnerable community members are not being forgotten. We've heard from many of you that you are already reaching out to your parishioners over 70 years old and we are most grateful for your efforts. For those of you who have not yet begun outreach efforts, if you are able, please do so in whatever manner is available to you (phone, email, U.S. mail). This is a time in which we can reach out to the elderly and isolated to offer encouragement, to pray with them and to listen to them. It is also a wonderful community building effort, and one that will strengthen relationships in this time of social distancing!

One of our parishes, Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier in Wilmette, has responded to these difficult times by mobilizing a group of nearly 50 volunteers in their parish to make calls to the elderly and vulnerable. Thanks to their efforts, over 1,000 people were contacted within a 72-hour period! Fr. Wayne Watts, the pastor, has generously shared some of the resources they have created, including a sample phone script, a sample letter to parishioners and instructions to parish volunteers who have assisted with making calls. Those resources are included within this document. We encourage you to adapt these resources to your own community context. Also, consider which groups within your parish may be especially gifted with participating in such an initiative (ministers of care, prayer groups, youth and young adult leaders, social ministry leaders, etc.).

We realize that not all parishes in the archdiocese have the capacity or volunteers to facilitate a large-scale outreach effort as outlined above, and our team at the Pastoral Center is eager to assist any community that may require assistance. In the coming days and weeks, we will be working both one-on-one and in group trainings to equip parishes in developing their own accompaniment efforts. Please contact us at ohds@archchicago.org if you would like additional support at this time.



Sample Letter to Volunteers (from the Pastor)
Adapted from Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier Parish

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for giving your time and talent during this difficult time for our world and vulnerable parishioners. I not only want to thank you but let you know that I am here for you too. These can be scary times. But we have each other and we have God! I am just a phone call or text away if you need anything. Remember to take care of yourselves as well. Being isolated is a difficult thing for us as humans; we are indeed social beings. Stay connected with each other and let people know how you are feeling. Together we can do Great things!

As we make phone calls to our vulnerable parishioners, I wanted to give you some advice. First, remember that the people you are calling might be in very difficult situations and take that out on you. They might even not want to talk to you or hang up on you. That is okay, it is not your fault; it is the circumstances. Stay calm, talk slowly and articulate your words. Many of our seniors have hearing impairments. Listen.

Below are two scripts we have made to help you but do not worry if you forget something or don't say it exactly as is; it's better that you be your natural self. They will appreciate your humanness. Sometimes you will have people who go right into talking and you cannot get the script across, that's okay, listen and then try to fit in your talking points. Remember when you are giving any numbers to say them to them twice or ask them that they got the number before you exit the call. It's important they have a number to call back.

I doubt this will happen, but if someone has a real emergency situation, tell him or her you are going to hang up and that they should call 911. If they cannot, tell them you will hang up and call 911 and send them to their address. Please call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX and send me an email to let me know at name@email.com.

I would suggest in the beginning of the call, as soon as you naturally can, get to the point that you are calling on my behalf, and that you are a member of the Saints JFX community. This will help ease the person on the other end and help them realize this is not a scam.

I am hoping that you will "adopt" the seniors to whom you have been assigned. Right now, most of them won't want or need anything. As this continues, they probably will. Please plan to check back every five days or so until this is over. Again, I am extremely grateful for you in this difficult time. You are not only the future of the Church, but its present. We need you more than ever, right now.

Peace,
Father Wayne
XXX-XXX-XXXX



Sample Script for Volunteers

Adapted from Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier Parish

If caller answers:

Hello this is...[insert name]

I'm calling on behalf of Father Wayne Watts from Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier.

May I speak to Mr. or Ms. [insert name]

How are you?

As the pandemic continues, we wanted you to know that there is a team of parishioners ready and willing to help during these challenging times. Know that we are here to help. Do you have any particular needs at this time? We would be happy to assist if you're in need of anything, or if you just need to talk...

Is there something you need now?

Can I call and check in with you again?

Would you like to pray together? [Can offer an Our Father, Hail Mary, or personal prayer]

Feel free to call me any time. My number is...[Your Number here] Ask that they got the number or repeat it.

If the call goes to voicemail:

Hello this is...[insert name]

I'm calling on behalf of Father Wayne Watts from Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier.

We are calling to check in and see how you are doing. We wanted you to know as the pandemic continues, a team of parishioners ready and willing to help. We are happy to help in connecting you to any resources you might need, or if you simply would like someone to talk to on the phone. Please don't hesitate to call us. You can call me [insert name]

at...[insert number]. Again this is [insert name] calling on behalf of Father Wayne Watts and you can reach me at...[insert number]

Tracking contacts as a community:

Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier has been utilizing a Google Sheet document to track phone calls as a group. [Here is a template like the one they are using.](#) As volunteers make their calls, they update the document. Volunteers who are assigned to specific parishioners will keep in touch throughout the pandemic.

Since shared documents can be edited by multiple people, it is important to ensure that information is not deleted. Some parishioners may prefer to receive an Excel sheet or printed list of contacts.



Sample Letter to Vulnerable Parishioners (from a fellow Parishioner)
Adapted from Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier Parish

Mrs. A Jones
XXX Wilmette Avenue
Wilmette IL 600XX

Dear Mrs. Jones,

I am writing to you on behalf of Fr. Wayne Watts at St Joseph and Francis Xavier Parish. My name is Jane Smith.

I am part of a committee that has offered to reach out to other members of our community during this pandemic. I am available to help troubleshoot if you are in need of resources, or just have a chat with you if you'd like to talk during this uncertain time.

I tried to call you this past week but unfortunately the phone number we have is disconnected/your voicemail was full and was not accepting messages.

I would like to get in touch with you. Please feel free to give me a call on XXX-XXX-XXXX or you can send me an email at name@email.com.

I hope you are keeping well and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith