

Diocese of Des Moines
Phase 3 Regathering Discernment Tool
Updated May 5th, 2021

General Considerations:

During phase 3, each pastor should discern when and how various parish activities can resume. A parish might discern that certain gatherings are more vital to the parish mission, or present lower risk factors, and therefore can resume sooner than others. This resource is to assist pastors in that discernment.

During phase 3, certain general standards apply to all events:

- Throughout phase 3, CDC guidance for events and gatherings (reflected in diocesan guidelines and also found [here](#)) must be followed.
- Starting May 15th, non-worship gatherings will be limited to the number of people a parish can properly social distance. Parishes will establish these numbers individually.
- During phase 3, all events remain conditional based on the public health situation.
- The risk of each event should be evaluated prior to agreeing to host the event. Factors that should be considered would be:
 - The average age of event participants. Individuals over the age of 60 are at a higher health risk if they contract COVID-19.
 - The duration of the event. The longer the event, the more potential exposure to COVID-19. When possible shorten the length of events, which will also help mitigate the risk of COVID-19 exposure.
 - The ability for proper social distancing during the event. All events should maintain a minimum of 6 feet distance between household units. Host events in the largest space possible, which will help mitigate the risk of COVID-19.
 - The ability to promote proper hygienic practices, like mask usage and frequent hand washing.
 - The percentage of participants who are travelling to event. Greater travel increases the risk of community spread.
 - The ability to clean and disinfect the meeting space after the event.
 - Whenever possible parishes should avoid serving refreshments at parish gatherings, as food service creates additional risks for COVID-19 infection.
 - Anticipate if an event risks exceeding the maximum participant limit. If so, consider prior registration, or other means of addressing this issue.
- The diocese requires the use of masks at all parish functions for those over the age of five, who do not have a medical or psychological condition prohibiting mask use.

While each particular event is unique and should be evaluated separately, parishes can anticipate four types of gatherings, all of which present particular questions for discernment.

General Parish Meetings:

This category might include gatherings such as pastoral council, Knights of Columbus, Altar and Rosary society, parish ministry leadership, or other such gatherings.

- Consider stronger requirements for distancing and hygienic practices at these meetings. It will be easier to enforce recommendations during these meetings, and these practices will lower the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- In general, these meetings tend to have less participants, and last for a shorter amount of time than other meetings, which mitigates risk.

Faith Formation Events involving adults only:

This category might include Bible studies, adult faith formation (for example, RCIA), prayer groups, ministry formation sessions, or other such gatherings.

- Consider how distancing and hygienic practices will be enforced throughout these meetings. For example, avoid check-in tables, which could compromise social distancing measures.
- During these events parishes should avoid printed handouts, or other distributed materials, that could increase the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Faith Formation Events involving adults and minors:

This category might include youth faith formation, scouting groups, youth groups or other such gatherings.

- Before promoting youth programs or events, parishes should consult with John Gaffney (religious education, vacation Bible school, sacramental preparation) or Justin White (youth ministry, summer missions) who can assist in planning. This can help assure parish staff, volunteers and families that events will be as safe as possible.
- Consider how distancing and hygienic practices will be enforced throughout these meetings. For example, avoid check-in tables, which could compromise social distancing measures.
- Make sure both minors and adults are aware of all social distancing and hygienic expectations. This should be communicated in advance, and may involve written consent or a risk acknowledgement document (see provided template).

Social Events:

This category might include funeral luncheons, wedding receptions, coffee and donuts, and other such gatherings.

- Consider how distancing and hygienic practices will be enforced throughout these gatherings. These gatherings will tend to be the most difficult to manage, and pastors might discern to wait longer before resuming such activities.
- If an outside group is using parish facilities, make distancing and hygienic practices clear in the user agreement, so that expectations have been articulated and agreed upon (see addendum template).

- Any group using parish facilities should be notified that all events are conditional during this time, dependent on the public health situation. This conditional status should be reflected in user agreements.
- Many of these events will involve food. Food service does create additional risks, both in the possibility of exposure via food service, but also the impulse toward closer socialization when food is served. Consider ways to avoid buffet line service, and instead serve food in a way that maintains social distancing throughout. Ensure that any wrapping or packaging of food is done in a way that avoids COVID-19 exposure.
- Many of these events will involve non-parishioners travelling to the parish, possibly from out of state. This will increase risks of COVID-19 exposure, especially if people are coming from communities with higher COVID cases.

If you have any questions regarding upcoming events, or would like to consult further on any aspects of our regathering procedures, please reach out to any of the following:

Adam Storey for general questions or concerns:

(515) 237-5056

John Gaffney for questions related to religious education, vacation Bible school, and sacramental preparation:

(515) 237-5026

Justin White for question related to youth ministry and summer missions:

(515) 237-5098