

TO: Pastors, School Administrators, and Business Managers

FROM: Eileen Valdez, HR Director
Paul Carlson, Finance Director

RE: Guidance for Parishes and Schools

DATE: 3/18/2020

CC: Bishop William Joensen, Ph.D.,
Dr. Donna Bishop
Jason Kurth
Sue McEntee

Thank you for your patience during this challenging time. We are getting a number of calls and emails regarding school and parish staffing issues and realize you are looking to us for answers. Bishop Joensen is currently inclined not to mandate a one-size-fits all solution for parishes and schools as he recognizes you are each in a unique situation. We are working with LMC and Nyemaster to keep up with the most up to date information in order to provide you with sound advice. Please know that we will work to provide you answers as soon as we are able.

Many of you have questions similar to:

Does the Diocese have any guidance to offer regarding employment/payment policies of non-teaching school staff (classroom aids, kitchen personnel, janitorial, etc.), day care providers, parish staff, etc. during this "slow-down time" in the parishes?

UNEMPLOYMENT (School staff)

For school staff that is not working or has reduced schedules, you have paid into unemployment through Iowa Catholic Conference. Employees currently not working should be considered furloughed employees so they can collect unemployment. We have confirmed that employees who are 'furloughed' do not need to use their vacation/PTO balance prior to being eligible for unemployment. **It is important for them to identify themselves as furloughed due to coronavirus COVID-19.**

Benefit considerations of unemployment

For full time furloughed employees who are currently covered by benefits (health, dental, life, etc.), our understanding is for the next 30 days they can maintain coverage. We are unsure about what would happen after 30 days but will stay in touch with LMC to keep you informed. An important question is how you will collect the insurance premiums from employees who you are not paying. We support continuing benefits and understand the concern for taking on the employee portion of the benefits. You may decide to work out a plan with the employee to repay the premiums over two to three pay periods when they return to work.

Directions on applying for unemployment benefits.

Once the hours are reduced/eliminated, a person can apply for benefits at <https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/> and click on “File a Claim.” Following setting up an account, they should choose the COVID-19 option that is available as the reason for filing.

PARISH EMPLOYEES

Our parish employees are not eligible for unemployment. Understanding that the financial impact of the current crisis will impact each parish differently, we do not believe it is prudent to mandate how you approach staffing. Similarly, not every parish can afford to adopt an “Administrative Leave,” similar to the Pastoral Center approach, but they may be able to allow staff to work from home. We encourage you to share your solutions with us and each other. For instance, one parish has reduced the number of hours that all employees are working to help keep all staff employed for as long as possible. This is a very creative way to help stretch the parish resources. This parish is making sure staff eligible for benefits still work 28 hours per week to maintain benefit eligibility.

Parishes were encouraged to create an Operating Reserve Fund, if you were able to you may find it beneficial to tap this source before selling off equity holdings.

Use of Restricted Funds

Other questions have arisen around use of restricted funds to assist during this time. Sue McEntee, Executive Director of The Catholic Foundation of Southwest Iowa (CFSWIA), has provided two resources that address accessing agency funds you may hold at the CFSWIA and how to adjust current restrictions on your funds.

Additionally, during emergency times such as these, it is possible for you to access restricted funds to assist you in your operations, provided the following:

1. Consultation with your parish finance council.
2. Approval from the bishop. This request can be made by letter from the pastor.

DIOCESAN STAFF

We have been asked what is being done for Pastoral Center staff. We have created a time off bank entitled Administrative Leave which allows an employee paid time off without exhausting their own leave banks. This leave is initially intended to cover 15 workdays with an opportunity to extend an additional 15 days. We are also finding creative ways for staff to work from home.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

As we prepare for the impact of coronavirus COVID-19 in our communities, please also remember that employees will not have any copays or deductibles if they are tested for COVID-19, our diocesan plan cover these tests. Please also remind your employees of the availability of Doctors on Demand and EAP (Employee Assistance Plan).

Contact Paul Carlson, pcarlson@dmdiocese.org with financial questions

Contact Eileen Valdez, evaldez@dmdiocese.org with unemployment and benefits questions

Contact Sue McEntee, smcentee@catholicfoundationiowa.org with agency fund access and distribution questions for the CFSWIA