

Strategy for Parish and Community Needs and Resources

“Freely you have received, freely give.” Jesus, Matthew 10:8

“If you believe that God truly cares for the poor, then take a courageous stand on this matter. For the One who cares for the poor will certainly lead those who struggle on behalf of the poor.”
Sts. Barsanuphius and John, Letter 831

“When [money] increases, it is the Spirit’s signal that the ministry must be increased, and when it is scarce, increased grace more than compensates for its lack.” Matthew the Poor, *If You Love Me*

BEFORE YOU START

What an opportunity we have at this time to encounter Christ among those who are poor and suffering! Here are some points to consider:

- Before beginning, pray, asking that God will give His love, wisdom, creativity, and endurance, as we prepare to more fully encounter Him as He reveals Himself through people in need.
- This document is a starting point for prayer, learning, action, and networking. Please adapt to your own situation and update frequently as you experiment. Please share additions that may be helpful to others (see end of document for contact information).
- This workbook is intended to be used by a team. The priest should not be the one who does all the work, but his job is to equip the members for ministry.
- The parish cannot meet all needs, but can be prepared to help those in need find the resources, either from among the parish, or other individuals or organizations. The needs and the task of finding resources can be overwhelming. Here are two strategies:
 - Identify what will have the biggest impact using the resources readily available in your parish, and give energy to meeting those needs.
 - Identify needs that are not being met by others in your community and focus on filling those needs, filling a niche that is otherwise neglected.
- Generally, people respond well to specific requests that have been approved by a priest and/or a response team. While some generously give to a discretionary fund, others will respond better to something like, “Can someone sponsor a monthly bus pass for someone to get to and from work?”
- Developed during the Coronavirus pandemic, the planning is appropriate for the long-term needs of the parish and community. As you plan for immediate needs, keep the big picture in front of you.
- Before any non-emergency need is met,
 - Take the time to discern if there are solutions that address the root causes of the need.
 - Inquire as to the availability of closer sources that can help. For example, are there family members or nearby neighbors who can help meet the need?

GETTING STARTED

Determine your parish's commitment to meeting the needs of the parish and community. Here are some questions to consider. Write down the answers for future reference and feel free to update as often as is useful. While it is helpful to be on the same page, please do not get stuck on this section!

1. What is our shared biblical understanding of why we are helping those who are poor and suffering?
2. Who are we preparing to help? Are we limiting this to members of the parish or those beyond? If beyond, are we going to set limits on who we will help, and if so, what will they be?
3. Who in our parish and community is especially connected, knowledgeable of resources, and/or has training (for example, in social work) to be a part of the response team?
4. What are our parish's strengths (such as wealthy and generous members) and weaknesses (for example, a location away from needs and resources, and members with no spare time) in meeting the needs of those in the parish and community?
5. Is there a niche in which we are especially well-equipped to meet needs? Are there needs in the parish and/or community that are overwhelmingly undermet?

6. Are we going to be passive (wait until people come to us with needs), proactive (make known that we are available and make it easy for people to contact us), or somewhere in between?

7. How are we going to communicate our availability to help, both to all parish members (so everyone is aware that this exists) and to those in the parish and community specifically in need? (Sign on church door, flyers, website, bulletin, posters, equipping all members to promote). Into what languages will you translate your materials? Will you have translators available when providing services? List action items and who is responsible for each.

8. What are the mechanisms for people to make their needs be known? (Phone calls, texts, in person, email, web form, certain hours or anytime, equipping all members to be on the lookout, checklist of needs and resources, etc.) Answer this question: "If I have a need, who do I contact and how?" List action items and who is responsible for each.

9. How are we going to recruit and equip parish members to be the point person to research and find existing resources for referral in various categories? List action items and who is responsible for each.

10. How are we going to match the needs to the point person in each category?

11. What systems will be put in place to effectively and efficiently meet the needs and/or direct people to where they can get help? What authority will each point person have to distribute any resources? List action items and who is responsible for each.

12. How are we going to publicize specific needs to the parish (for example, “Does anyone have a pack of diapers, size 4?”) What authority will each point person have to communicate needs with the parish? List action items and who is responsible for each.

13. Who else should we include as partners? Who should we inform of our plan and services? (Existing referral agencies, schools, other churches.) List action items and who is responsible for each.

14. Are there any liability issues (such as clearances needed for childcare), and how will we address those?

15. How often will the response team meet to follow up on the above action items? Who will call and lead the meetings? What are your other next steps?

Specifically in the current economic climate:

- How will we identify those in our parish and community who have lost income because of the shutdown?
- What help can we as a parish provide to those with lost income?
- How will we invite those hardest hit (for example, those with no job and no savings, and those already struggling) to receive help?

IDENTIFY THE NEEDS

Here are some of the common needs that people in your parish and the community may have.

- I need help paying my rent or mortgage.
- I need emergency housing.
- I need employment (temporary or permanent).
 - I need tools/supplies to do my trade.
- I need food.
 - I have a way to prepare food, and need groceries.
 - I need already prepared food.
 - I have allergies or other food restrictions.
- I have difficulty getting to a store or food bank.
- I need household supplies.
- I need diapers/formula.
- I need help paying my utilities:
 - I need help with electricity.
 - I need help with gas.
 - I need help with my phone.
- I need help with transportation.
 - I need rides to/from:
 - I need money for bus/train/airplane fares:
 - I need help with car repairs:
 - I need a bike:
- I need clothing.
 - I need everyday clothes for myself and others:
 - I need work uniforms.
- I need health insurance.
- I need childcare.
- I need help with medication/medical bills/medical devices.
- I need help with home repairs and maintenance.
- I need legal help and/or help paying legal fees.
- I need therapy/counseling.
- I am all alone and/or far from my support systems.
- I need help with respite care.
- I am an immigrant or refugee, and I need help assimilating and/or learning English.
- I need an ID.
- I need help with funeral preparation/expenses.

IDENTIFY THE RESOURCES

Identify who in the parish can meet this need or connect to an organization or person who can meet the need. Encourage team members to sign up to be the point person for each resource to research information and opportunities, and to make connections.

Note: these questions were put together by someone who is not an expert in any of these fields (they are a starting point for brainstorming) and asks that they be re-worded and expanded to be more helpful.

I need help paying my rent or mortgage.

- What are the local laws regarding late rent payments and eviction?
- What rent assistance programs are available?
- If a move is possible/desirable, are cheaper and adequate rental units available?

- What are the laws regarding late mortgage payments/foreclosure?
- What resources are available for refinancing a mortgage or put off a foreclosure?
- If a move is possible/desirable, is selling and moving into a less expensive home an option?

I need emergency housing.

- Does the parish or any members have a room, apartment, or RV available for temporary lodging?
- What shelters are accessible and what are the requirements for staying there? Offer to go with the person.
- Are funds available to pay for a hotel? What are the procedures? What obstacles can be overcome or minimized by other resources (food, transportation, etc.)?

I need employment (temporary or permanent).

I need tools/supplies to do my trade.

- Are there any employers in the parish/community who are hiring for this type of skill?
- What agencies exist to help jobseekers find employment?
- Who can provide help in obtaining tools or supplies for a tradesperson to do his/her trade?
- What other obstacles can be overcome by other resources (childcare, transportation, etc.)? See other sections of this worksheet.

I need food.

I have a way to prepare food, and need groceries.

I need already prepared food.

I have allergies or other food restrictions.

I have difficulty getting to a store or food bank.

- Does the parish have grocery store gift cards to give to those who have transportation to get there? What is the procedure for distribution?
- Does the parish have a food bank or can start one?
- Does the parish provide meals open to the community? How do people know they are invited?
- What food banks and meal distribution sites are there locally? Have the addresses, hours, and any requirements readily accessible to hand out.
- Who are the gardeners? Encourage members to grow vegetables to share with the parish and community. Teach gardening classes.
- What obstacles can be overcome or minimized by other resources (transportation, etc.)?

I need household supplies.

I need diapers/formula.

- Is there someone in the parish who might be willing to donate these items?
- Does the local food bank carry these items?
- Is there a pregnancy center or related healthcare facility that provides these items?

I need help paying my utilities.

I need help with electricity.

I need help with gas.

I need help with my phone.

- What programs are available to help with electric and utility bills? Learn the requirements and process. Offer to help the person apply.
- What expenses (such as wasted heat or AC in a drafty house) can be overcome or minimized by other resources (home repairs and maintenance)?
- Does the phone company offer a grace period? What phone plans are available that would be adequate and cheaper? Offer to help the person switch.

I need help with transportation.

I need rides to/from:

I need money for bus/train/airplane fares:

I need help with car repairs:

I need a bike.

- Who in the parish has a vehicle and time, and is willing and able to drive others?
- Research and resolve any liability issues with individuals driving other people.
- Does anyone in the parish have a bike to donate? Is there someone who can make sure the bike is in good condition? Develop a system to match drivers and riders.
- Do local bus companies sell all-day/all-zone passes that can be distributed for one-time needs?
- Are there funds available for buying monthly local bus passes?
- Do regional/national bus, train, and airline companies sell gift cards? Can someone's travel points be transferred to the recipient? (Note: long distance travel assistance can be offered for someone to attend a funeral they might not otherwise be able to attend; or to return to a distant support system. We're not suggesting paying for vacation travel, but if you're able to and feeling generous, go for it!)
- Are there mechanics in the parish who can offer free or discounted repairs?
- Who are the reliable and affordable mechanics in the area? Offer to provide temporary transportation while the car is being repaired.

I need clothing.

I need everyday clothes for myself and others:

I need work uniforms.

- Who in the parish has extra clothing in the sizes/seasons needed?
- What clothing banks are accessible?
- Do local thrift stores offer gift cards that can be purchased and distributed?

I need health insurance.

- Who in the parish knows how to navigate health insurance options?
- Does the person qualify for a Christian health-sharing plan, and if so, is it a good option?

I need childcare.

- What resources exist in the community for emergency childcare (for example, the parent becomes sick)?
- Who in the parish is available to watch children? What are the liabilities involved? Are clearances required?
- Is the parish able to open a childcare facility or assist a member to open one?
- What nearby childcare facilities are accessible and affordable?

I need help with medication/medical bills/medical devices.

- Are there any doctors or nurses in the parish who would be willing to do basic triage, or basic regular checkups (checking vitals, etc.) or answer questions by phone/internet?
- What clinics are available? What are their hours? What are their payment structures?
- How do the local medical facilities (ER, urgent care, family doctors) handle patients with no insurance?
- Is there someone who can assist with negotiating medical facility fees?
- Who in the parish can donate medical devices (wheelchair, crutches, etc.)?
- Is there a local pharmacy with which you can arrange direct payments from the parish for paying for recipients' prescriptions?

I need help with home repairs and maintenance.

- Who in the parish has home repair skills/maintenance?
- Are there agencies that provide assistance for home repairs?
- Are donations of paint or other supplies needed from the parish?
- What are the local building codes for small and larger construction projects?
- Can the parish host classes to teach home maintenance skills?

I need legal help and/or help paying legal fees.

- Are there any lawyers in the parish who can provide pro-bono or discounted services?
- What local law firms advocate for and are willing to work with those who have no or minimal income?
- Can the parish provide assistance in negotiating a payment plan for legal fees/debt?

I need therapy/counseling.

- Are there any psychologists, psychiatrists, or therapists in the parish who can do basic triage?
- How do the local counseling offices handle patients with no insurance?
- Is there someone who can assist with negotiating fees?
- What are the phone numbers or online help options (chat with a professional, etc.) for people to get help when no one else is available?
- Is there a local pharmacy with which you can arrange direct payments from the parish for paying for recipients' prescriptions?
- Is the parish priest trained to determine when professional counseling is helpful?
- What is being done for prevention in regards to mental health in the parish and community?

I am all alone and/or far from my support systems.

- What are the opportunities for socializing in the parish for those who are alone?
- Is it possible/advantageous for the person to return to their support system? What other obstacles can be overcome by other resources (transportation, etc.)? See other sections of this worksheet.
- Is there a coordinated arrangement for shut-ins and college students who are far from home to be contacted regularly and to be included in the life of the parish?
- Who are the encouragers who can send cards or texts? Who can invite others for meals or other family events?

I am a caregiver and need help with respite care.

- Who in the parish is available to offer respite care? What are the liabilities involved? Are clearances required?
- What resources exist in the community for respite care?
- How is the parish regularly caring for the caregivers?

I am an immigrant or refugee, and I need help assimilating and/or learning English.

- What refugee agencies are there locally and what services do they provide? Typically, refugees have come to the U.S. through an agency that provides much of the support, and can instruct your team on how to be most helpful.
- Who in the parish is available to spend time with those new to the area and language (such as shopping together)?
- Is the parish available to offer ESL classes?
- What are the resources in the community for learning English?
- If there is another language (such as Spanish) that is common in the church's neighborhood, invite someone from that language group to give lessons to parishioners and the community.
- What parts of the Liturgy and other services ("Lord have mercy," "Our Father," etc.) can be spoken/chanted in other languages to make it easier for someone to feel part of the community?
- Especially during feasts and other celebrations, how can newcomers be included as much as family members?

I need an ID.

- What is the procedure for a person to replace/obtain an ID? Learn what is required and the method of applying. Assist the person in filling out the paperwork.
- Are there temporary needs that can be met while the person is waiting for the ID?

I need help with funeral preparation/expenses.

- Does the parish have a burial society? (See the very helpful book, *A Christian Ending*, for details on how to start one.)
- Does the parish have a cemetery? What are the requirements, fees, and process for obtaining a plot?
- Are there local funeral homes that offer discounts for those who cannot afford their services?
- Where are the local cemeteries that offer affordable burial plots? What is the procedure for obtaining a lot at short notice?
- What is the plan for assisting those who cannot afford the services of a funeral home and/or a burial plot?
- Does the parish allow funeral services to be held at the church for non-members?
- Is there a mercy meal for those who attend funeral services?
- What follow up support will you provide specifically in the days and months after a funeral?