

# MAY NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE OFFICE OF FAITH FORMATION



Re-mem-bering  
Our Sunday Story

## What will they come back to? Re-mem-bering our Sunday Story

Early this spring, Bishop Persico asked a committee of lay people and clergy to begin planning to invite and welcome people to Mass as the diocese prepares for the return of the Sunday obligation. The committee and its work was announced in a news release in early April. ([Click here](#) if you missed it. Msgr. Richard Siefer has joined the committee since this announcement.) The committee is developing resources for parishes to use over the next several months. In the coming weeks, you can expect a slate of resources and their release dates.

Please Note: There is no date set for the return of the Sunday obligation. The scope of this committee is not the return to the obligation. It does focus on providing resources and experiences that assist parishes as they reach out to their people and provide a vibrant experience when they do return to public worship. Resources currently under construction

include:

- A series of high-quality, story-based and catechetical videos
- Pastoral letter from Bishop Persico
- Print resources with common language for use on social media and in bulletins
- A collection of scripted experiences parishes can use and/or adapt to provide a positive encounter with those who are not currently returning to public worship.



**A little more like mercy, a little more like grace, a little more like kindness, goodness, love and faith, and little more like patience, a little more like peace, a little more like Jesus, a little less like me! The chorus from the Zach Williams song sure rings true in the ever-changing environment of the pandemic and what we are to do!**

With the newly released guidelines from the CDC, and the updated protocols from the diocese, it seems life has turned on a dime once again, leaving some of us a bit confused as to what we are supposed to be doing now. It is “mask confusion!” As we navigate these updated protocols, let us do so with a lot of mercy and grace for each other.

A few notes: In the wake of widespread confusion, the CDC has indicated that it intends to revise the latest guidelines. **A summary of the current CDC guidelines is below:**

- Fully vaccinated people:
  - Do not need to wear a mask or physically distance in any setting, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.
  - Should continue to wear a well-fitted mask in correctional facilities and homeless shelters.
- Unvaccinated people:
  - Continue to mask and physically distance.

- Follow other [prevention measures](#) still recommended for unvaccinated people.

Since the landscape for recommendations changed quickly, you surely noticed that diocesan guidance for parishes changed quickly, too. **Below is a summary of some of the more significant updates in Diocese of Erie protocols.** The loosening of restrictions at the parish level is ultimately the decision of the pastor, who is asked to make the decisions that are best for his people and the needs of his parish.



- Individuals are no longer required to wear masks when in church. Those who are not fully vaccinated are **strongly encouraged** to wear masks while in church, both for their protection and that of others.
- The use of all pews in churches is permitted.
- The doors to the church are to be propped open before and after Mass when possible.
- The use of servers, lectors, musicians and choirs is permitted.
- A verbal exchange of the sign of peace is permitted among the faithful.
- Priests may now greet parishioners before or after Mass, provided it is done outside and that they do not shake hands.

**Please note that the following things have not changed:**

- The distribution of the Precious Blood still is not permitted.
- Holy water may not be placed in fonts.
- Nothing may remain in pews, including hymnals.
- Hand sanitizer is to be available at the church entrance for parishioners.
- Collection baskets are not to be used in the pews.
- The bishop continues to strongly recommend that Communion be received in the hand, but the right to receive on the tongue remains in place.
- Those approaching to receive the Eucharist are encouraged to sanitize their hands before getting in line.
- Parishioners who are not feeling well are to stay home.
- The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday and holy day Masses remains in place. For this reason, parishes are encouraged to continue livestreaming Mass as an option wherever feasible.

Those who are not fully vaccinated are still to be equally welcomed and encouraged to attend Masses and gatherings. No sense of discrimination should be experienced by those not fully vaccinated. Pastors and pastoral administrators are to implement the new policy as best they can and are encouraged to work with their parish leadership to make the necessary changes and adjustments. One way for priests, deacons and ministers who are fully vaccinated to make all feel comfortable would be to still wear masks during distribution of Holy Communion at Mass. Another gesture of hospitality could be that all greeters and ushers continue to wear masks. This is certainly at the discretion of the pastor to determine the policy for his parish. Please continue to accommodate those with medical conditions that prevent mask-wearing (who are not fully vaccinated) in a separate space such as a cry room or choir loft.



## New marriage preparation option

This month, the Diocese of Erie piloted a new option for marriage preparation. The **Mentor-Cohort** option is designed to provide an opportunity for engaged couples to **connect** to other couples and the church family, **grow** and strengthen their relationship with God and each other in an ongoing way, and have a space to **be real** about the joys and challenges of forming a new family in marriage. As part of the cohort, participants committed to learning from Dynamic Catholic's *Better Together* video series, meeting online with other engaged couples and mentor couples, and completing discussion and challenge activities over the course of four weeks. So, how did it go?

### 100 percent of couples reported that they

- Grew in relationship with their fiancé
- Built meaningful connections with other couples across the diocese
- Felt that there was someone friendly in the church who valued them
- Received practical tools to build a strong marriage.

88 percent reported that it helped them deepen their relationship with God.

Every respondent said that they would recommend the experience to others. We wanted to take a moment to share some of what they are saying:

“The mentors were extremely helpful, and kind and it was encouraging listening to the other couples.”

“[I valued] The chance to hear from the mentor couples about how they have worked through certain topics (money, family, etc.). We're growing and learning, and it was good to hear their perspectives and how they've grown and learned over time too.”

“I think it was better than a one-day marathon event. I'm sure it would have been nice to be all in one place in person for a full day, but I think we would have gotten tired by the end. I like that we had to commit and regroup and reflect every week rather than it being a one-time thing.”

Our next cohort begins in October. Don't let those you love who are preparing for marriage miss it! You can reach out to Kate at 814-824-1261 to learn more or get the basics at <https://www.eriercd.org/familylifeoffice/mentor-cohort.html>.



### Grief Ministry startup training and support offered

Do you know someone at your parish who is grieving the loss of a loved one? How does your parish support them post-funeral?

In the wake of COVID-19, several parishioners suffered the loss of a loved one and were unable to mourn in familiar ways. You can help them grieve their loss and feel cared for by your parish through a parish-based grief ministry. The Marriage and Family Life Office is piloting an authentically Catholic, straightforward, and effective grief support program, Grieving with Great Hope, at the parish level in the coming months. Ministry startup support is tailored to make hosting your own grief ministry simple, straightforward, and sustainable. Those who recognize the need for grief ministry in their parish are encouraged to call or email Kate Wilson ([kwilson@eriercd.org](mailto:kwilson@eriercd.org), 814-824-1261) to learn more. Parishes that decide to take part in the pilot will be provided a Zoom training for ministry leaders, followed by in-person support tailored for your parish.



We've gathered a list of resources that are ready to plug-and-play in your parish's work of lifelong faith formation. These best practices are designed to give parishes resources that are successful in responding to the needs of all people in their various stages of faith development. Before delving into the ministries below, parish leaders should take time to identify the common questions and challenges of their parishioners. This is most effectively done by using the parish self-assessment tool, which can be accessed [here](#), but can also be done through parish surveys or informal conversations.

The best practices are listed by their name, followed by the question or challenge that ministry addresses at a particular stage of life (see Seat at the Table [here](#) for the comprehensive list of questions for each stage of life). Some ministries answer more than one challenge or question as indicated by the *primary* and *secondary* lists. We include a summary of each practice, and more information is available by clicking on the practice name. Find the best practice resources your parish needs [here](#).

### Pending arrivals:



Jen Durney, administrative assistant in Faith Formation as well as campus minister at Penn State Behrend, is anxiously awaiting the birth of her third child, and Jillian Zaczyk, director of Faith Formation for Young Adult and Youth, is looking forward to the birth of her second child. The babies are due the first two weeks of June, but Jen just may not wait that long! Jen will be out on maternity leave from May 28<sup>th</sup> to August 20<sup>th</sup>, and Jillian will be out June 15<sup>th</sup> to August 23<sup>rd</sup>.