

To Protect

**Office of Victim Assistance
& Safe Environment
Archdiocese of San
Antonio**



Special points of interest:

Parish Audits

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September 2020

Volume 15, Issue 3



Safe Environment Parish Audits

In January 2020, the Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment began auditing parishes to ensure that all employees and catechists are current on all Safe Environment trainings, the Code of Conduct, and Criminal Background Checks.

The office will contact parishes and ask for a list of all catechists who minister to those under the age of 18. This is a beginning point for each parish to then review the other volunteers to ensure all parish volunteers are in compliance.

It is vital that every employee and volunteer be fully trained in Safe Environment trainings, sign and review the Code of Conduct, and submit a Criminal Background Check.

We have audited 9 Parishes so far: St. Pius X, Our Lady of Grace, St. Dominic's, St. Gregory the Great, Our Lady of Guadalupe—Helotes, St. Luke SA, St. Matthew, St. Leo the Great, and St. James the Apostle.

So far, the audits show a diligent effort in ensuring all trainings are completed. Thank you so much for all your hard work!

We are auditing at least three parishes a month. These audits will become a regular function of the Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment. If you haven't been audited, don't worry, we'll get to you soon.

During this time, we understand the fluidity of our circumstances, should you have any questions regarding your parish Safe Environment trainings, please do not hesitate to give our office a call.



Coronavirus, Mass, and Catholic Life

Eight things for Catholics to know and share

Jimmy Akin 3/18/2020

The coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic has produced many questions and controversies, including how it is impacting people's ability to attend Mass and receive the sacraments.

How dangerous is the virus? What should be our response as Catholics?

Here are eight things to know and share.

1) How dangerous is the coronavirus?

Nobody knows for sure. The virus only emerged a few months ago, so doctors are only now getting experience with it.

Some have compared Covid-19 to the flu, which is a well-understood and predictable disease.

It appears that Covid-19 is much more infectious than the flu. A person with the flu will infect an average of 1.3 other people, but a person with Covid-19 [will infect](#) an average of between two and 3.11 additional people. Covid-19 thus has the chance to spread much more rapidly.

Covid-19 is also much deadlier than the flu. In the United States, the death rate for the flu is usually around 0.1%. The death rate for Covid-19 is not yet well understood, but [it appears to be](#) between 1.4% and 2.3%—making it between fourteen and twenty-three times more deadly than the flu.

While it is true that—at present—more people are killed by the flu than by Covid-19, governments and health authorities are working to keep the latter from becoming as common as the flu.

[There are](#) around 27,000,000 cases of flu each year in the U.S., resulting in around 36,000 deaths.

If Covid-19 became as common as the flu (and, remember, it's actually *more* infectious than the flu), there would be around 500,000 deaths.

This is what authorities are trying to prevent.

2) Is everyone equally at risk?

No. Covid-19 hits certain people much harder than others. People younger than sixty are much less likely to die because of the disease, though they can still catch and spread it.

They may even have it but not feel sick and yet spread it to others. In fact, a recent study suggests that more than eighty percent of current cases were spread by people who [did not know they had the virus](#).

People older than sixty are much more likely to die, and the risk increases with each decade of age. People with other underlying conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease also have increased risk of dying.

3) Why are bishops cancelling Masses and dispensing people from their Sunday obligations? Aren't Christians called to be martyrs?

Christians are called to be martyrs when we are forced into the situation. If we are directly asked if we are followers of Christ, we cannot disown our faith. "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12).

However, this doesn't mean we are called to rush into martyrdom. In fact, Jesus said that we can flee persecution for our faith: "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next" (Matt. 10:23).

The requirement to witness to our faith thus does not mean Christians can't take reasonable steps to protect themselves from physical danger.

If it is morally permissible to leave town to avoid one physical danger (being killed by people who hate our faith), so is staying home from Mass for a few weeks to avoid another physical danger (being killed by a plague).

4) Are bishops being too quick to cancel Mass?

The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium* 11), so no bishop will take the decision to suspend Masses lightly.

The decision involves a prudential judgment call, so there is no single answer that obviously applies in all situations. This means the faithful should

pray for the bishops as they wrestle with this issue and show respect for the difficult decisions they are having to make.

They also should bear in mind that:

- In some places, bishops may not have much of a choice, as public authorities have prohibited public gatherings over a certain size.
- Epidemics [grow exponentially](#), so the only way to stop them is to take early action—*before* the situation becomes severe. If you wait until an epidemic has gotten really bad in an area, it is too late.

5) When are people allowed to stay home from Mass?

People are allowed to stay home from Mass in [three situations](#):

- When one has a *legitimate excuse* (e.g., because a person is at elevated risk of acquiring Covid-19)
- When one is *dispensed* by the competent authority (e.g., the pastor or bishop)
- When it is *impossible* to go (e.g., because Masses have been cancelled)

6) On what basis can pastors and bishops dispense a person?

The *Code of Canon Law* provides that the pastor of a parish can give a dispensation in individual cases, as can the superiors of religious institutes ([can. 1245](#)).

The bishop's authority is greater. He can "dispense the faithful from universal and particular disciplinary laws issued for his territory" by the Vatican ([can. 87 §1](#)). This is the category of laws that the Sunday obligation belongs to.

7) What should we do if staying home from Mass?

One is not legally obligated to do anything on these days. However, the Church [strongly recommends](#) that the faithful undertake another form of spiritual activity:

If participation in the eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or for another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful take part in a liturgy of the word if such a liturgy is celebrated in a parish church or other sacred place according to the prescripts of the diocesan bishop or that they devote themselves to prayer for a suitable time alone, as a family, or, as the occasion permits, in groups of families ([can. 1248 §2](#)).

Watching a Mass on television or the Internet also is a possibility, and some parishes and dioceses stream Masses on their web sites. Participating in the Liturgy of the Hours is another possibility ([can. 1174 §2](#)), as are reading the Bible and spiritual works.

8) What should I do if I'm not sure whether I'm getting sick?

Err on the side of caution. With many diseases, people are *most infectious* just before they start feeling sick and just after they start having symptoms. Therefore, if you think you might be getting sick, you may be at the point where you have the greatest chance of infecting another person.

Even if you do not feel sick, you may be able to spread the virus to others, so it is important to follow safety practices even if you currently feel fine.

This applies especially if you have contact with older people or those with health conditions that put them at greater risk of dying from Covid-19.

Remember: We are not just protecting ourselves; we are protecting those around us.

If we don't *have* the virus, we can't *give* it to others. Even if we're young and healthy, we're protecting the more vulnerable. That is a physical work of mercy, and it's an act of love for others. As Jesus taught us, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/coronavirus-mass-and-catholic-life>

8 Teacher-Approved Ways to Help Your Child With Online Learning

May 19, 2020 by [CHANDLER PLANTE](#)

With [most schools closed](#), what initially seemed like the world's longest day off has since evolved into an uncharted area of stress and grainy [Zoom calls](#). No matter how hard you might wish it, the unfortunate reality is that no teacher is going to show up in your living room to save the day, making the school day a million times more hands-on for many parents.

Without an in-person educator, parents are now the ones who have to guide their children throughout their academics, which is a lot of added responsibility in the midst of an already [anxiety-ridden pandemic](#). Luckily, if you're having difficulty keeping your kids on task and engaged with their work, there are some strategies that can [help make virtual schooling easier](#) for them. We talked to teachers about what they suggest for parents wondering [how to help their kids with online learning](#), and their advice will make it seem as though your kids never left the classroom.

1) Establish a Schedule: If your child's teacher has not already provided one, DeDe Alexander, an elementary school Spanish immersion teacher, says that [creating a schedule](#) can help kids stay on track. "Kids like a routine even if you aren't a routine person," she says, explaining that schedules are especially great if you want your child to work more independently. Plus, this takes some of the stress off of you by setting a specific structure for your kids to follow.

For those with multiple children at home, Ms. Alexander says you can also try breaking up your kids' days by class, so that everyone is working on the same subject at once (math, history, science, etc). This will help you stay in the know, and you can even add fun breaks and rewards for additional incentive, especially if your [child is feeling unmotivated](#).

2) Let Your Child Explore: Although it can be tempting to [step in whenever your child has a question](#), Kirsten Tobin, a third-grade teacher from Arizona, says that sometimes it's better to give young students a moment to work the problem out themselves. "Kids learn best by exploring," she says. "It might take them a bit longer, but chances are they will figure it out without direct parental interference."

The other great thing about encouraging your kids to try things themselves is establishing that you're not going to do everything for them (which would be exhausting). If they're still having difficulty with the material after a few honest tries, that's when you can get more involved.

3) Repeat After Me: If after trying their hardest your child is still struggling with an assignment, Ms. Alexander suggests doing a practice problem together and then having your child repeat it by themselves afterwards. This helps them engage with what they're learning and these kinds of exercises can also help you identify the places where your child is getting stuck. Once they've successfully completed the problem on their own, they can then move on and try other problems without as much assistance.

4) Do Some Check-Ins: When it comes to [online learning](#), Ms. Tobin says that it's a good idea to schedule check-ins halfway through the week, so that your child doesn't accidentally fall behind and have to cram last minute. She says these check-ins can also be "a great opportunity to talk to kids about procrastination and advocating for themselves when they feel stuck."

Ms. Alexander agrees, saying, "Very rarely do you have a kid who's going to be able to do this on their own without check-ins." This is another way to encourage your child to do their own work, while still keeping them focused and teaching them the skills they'll actually need for their next year of schooling.

5) Be Real About Managing Stress: In these chaotic times, parents and [kids alike are dealing with a lot of stress](#), but emphasizing that your child is not alone can help them feel better about any obstacles they may encounter during online schooling. In fact, it could even be a good mantra to repeat to yourself when you start to feel overwhelmed. Ms. Tobin and Ms. Alexander also stress that teachers are great partners to turn to if your family needs extra support. After all, sometimes the best thing you can do for your child is to just take a deep breath yourself.

6) Try to Keep Up With the Texts and Emails: Should you ever feel completely lost about what your child is supposed to be doing, Ms. Alexander suggests double checking the texts and emails sent from school faculty. It can be a pain, but for quick clarification and information about assignments, this kind of communication can be useful.

Texts and emails from your child's teacher may also contain details about any special programs or software that the class has been using, since you may not be familiar with everything yourself. After that, the only hard part will be getting your child to remember their username and password.

7) Have Them Read Their Writing Aloud: For reading and writing assignments, Ms. Alexander says that having your [children read aloud](#) to you can help them edit their work and become stronger writers. This is also a great chance for you to hear what their reading and writing skills sound like, and they'll be so excited to get to share their work with an attentive audience. Try this at night time or whenever you like to read together to help your kids feel proud of what they've accomplished.

8) Remember You Both Can Do This: At the end of the day, most assignments should still be doable, even from a virtual classroom. If your child is consistently struggling with the material, or you're having to intervene an excessive amount, it's a good idea to turn to the professionals. And if motivation is the bigger issue, here's [a list of ways to motivate your child](#) at home.

Most importantly, know that your family is not alone in all the recent schooling confusion, and that there are plenty of resources available if you need them. According to Ms. Tobin, the best lesson kids could learn right now is how to roll with the punches. "I'd take this as an opportunity to watch my kid develop some grit, teach them some strategies for managing stress, and let it all ride out," she says. And that's something everyone should take notes on.

Scheduled Training

Please contact your Safe Environment Coordinator at your Parish for a list of Scheduled Training.

THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

This continues to be a challenging year for our entire community. When this pandemic began, the hope was that it would only last a few weeks and then things would slowly get back to normal. 6 months later, the pandemic still rages on and we are no way near "normal". Things may never get back to the way they were but hopefully things brighten up soon. We must do our part to be safe and to lessen the impact of the virus. As a community and as a Church, we must learn to adapt to these times and keep moving forward.

The Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment is now responsible for Criminal Background Checks within the Archdiocese of San Antonio. All questions on background checks can be directed to the office. The office is currently looking at ways to streamline the criminal background check process. Look for changes in the near future.

As was discussed in an earlier article, the office is conducting monthly audits on parishes. We want to ensure that employees and catechists are compliant with the Code of Conduct. All trainings and background checks must be done in order to be compliant. The audit consists of our office reviewing parish employment records and matching them with the background check and training databases. The parish is told of the discrepancies and asked to address them within the next few weeks. The goal of the audit isn't to get anyone in trouble but to educate the parish on what they can do to improve their safe environment. We want to ensure that the Archdiocese is all on the same page.

The start of the school and catechetical year is usually a busy time within the Archdiocese. The pandemic has slowed things down a bit, however, that doesn't stop our mandates. Please ensure that all new volunteers and employees are getting their trainings done in a timely manner. We must continue to be the leaders and examples for the community.

— Steve Martinez, LCSW, LSOTP

