

Managing Conflict

Guidelines

Diocese of Rockford



In conjunction with:

Archdiocese of Chicago

Diocese of Joliet

Diocese of Peoria

Diocese of Springfield

Diocese of Belleville



Guidelines for Managing Conflict

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General Notes:

- To keep the Parishioners, church staff, and volunteers safe during the Covid-19 epidemic, it is critical to plan and practice the most effective way to greet parishioners, ensure safety, and provide them with a joyful experience when they arrive for mass or sacrament.
- Parishioners will be excited, scared, and full of emotion regarding being out in public and coming back to church.
- It is important to have an additional Greeter outside the Vestibule or Entrance of the church to address any issues while the other Greeter continues to check people into the church.
- The second Greeter is a critical role to ensure that the reopening is calm, safe, and gratifying.
- This document is to be used to assist in the reduction in tension or stress of any interpersonal situations related to the reopening the church.
- It is recommended that this document is reviewed by and available to all volunteers, pastors, and others involved in reopening events to ensure that they use the tips and guidelines contained within.

“The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up.” – Pope Francis

These guidelines are to be utilized if a parishioner comes to worship and they either do not have the required protection, don't adhere to the social distancing guidelines, do not have an reservation for services, or other conflicts that may arise as a result of reopening of the church. This does not replace any existing protocols that your parish currently has in place and only enhances those plans.

Engaging the Parishioner

TASK #1

Managing Conflict

Step 1: Demonstrate the safety you need from the Parishioners

Make sure you are wearing all of the protective equipment, disinfecting hands, and practicing the social distancing you are asking them to adhere to.

Step 2: Greet the Parishioner

Use a kind and gentle tone and introduce yourself while asking about their concerns.

Step 3: Be confident and stay calm

As you talk to the parishioner you may hear a lot of emotionally charged words and actions. It is important to realize that anything that is said is not about you personally and is about the issue the parishioner is dealing with.

Take deep breaths and remain calm to make sure that the parishioner does not feed off of any doubt or anxiety that you are feeling during the interaction. It's okay to be anxious; just don't let the parishioner hear it in your voice or see it in your body language.

Step 4: Listen to the parishioner but hear the emotion

Thank them for sharing their concerns with you and label what you and speak what you perceive as the emotion they are feeling. Acknowledge the importance of their perspective and that you understand their feelings.

Step 5: Be aware of body language

A parishioner's body language can often provide more insight than what they are saying. Watch for a tightening of the jaw, clenched hands, lack of eye contact, pacing, or fidgeting. These are all signs of deep frustration and anger about the situation.

Step 6: Apologize

Apologize for how this situation is making them feel and remind them that we are doing everything we can to accommodate everyone safely.

Step 7: Ask open-ended questions

Get the parishioner talking more about what they are feeling, and you may get to the root of the problem.

It's okay if they get more emotional while you are asking questions. This may be the first time someone is actually being listened to about their issue.

Step 8: Summarize what they tell you

Summarize their concerns, gather information, and see if there is anything you can do to accommodate them. Get their contact information to follow up with additional help or services.

Note: Many parishioners can view the church as a lifeline in their time of personal crisis. They may be unemployed, lost a loved one, hungry, or scared of the pandemic. Whatever their concern is, it is important to determine how the church can assist.

Step 9: Move them outside or away from the Parishioners

If the parishioner is highly agitated, ask them to step outside or away from others.

Step 10: Maintain your distance

Sometimes frustration and anger can boil over, causing some to remove themselves from the situation in an attempt to calm down. Make sure the parishioner feels like they can walk away from the situation. Don't put them into an area where they feel boxed in and cannot remove themselves if they need to do so.

Step 11: Ask them to leave

If the parishioner is not calming down and continues to escalate the situation, ask them to leave. There are some situations that, even after talking with the parishioner, they are unable to become calm. If they are continuing to escalate, politely but firmly ask them to leave.

Step 12: Threatening or violent behaviors

Should the parishioner become threatening or violent, another greeter should be prepared to call 911. It should not be the greeter who is talking with the parishioner in order to avoid losing focus on them. If you feel physically threatened or unsafe, this should be done immediately.

Active Listening Dos and Don'ts

Dos and Don'ts

Do This:

- Listen to Understand
- Be Approachable
- Ask Open-Ended Questions
- Give Feedback
- Explore Options
- Make Sure You Understand
- Be Open Minded
- Share Similar Experience
- Validate their Emotions

Don't Do This:

- Listen to Speak
- Be Dismissive
- Be Ingenuine
- Ask Yes/No Questions Only
- Give Answers
- Try to Fix It
- Assume You Understand
- Be Judgmental
- Take the Spotlight
- Tell them They're Overreacting
- Guess or Take It On Alone

If the above actions are not successful, be aware of the emergency contact numbers and procedures for your location and parish.