

## Basic social media outreach for parishes during Covid-19 distancing



Roman Catholic  
Diocese of Winona-Rochester

Greetings in Christ to all of you. Under the worst of circumstances, we're creating a basic social media outreach primer during Covid-19, social distancing, and sheltering in place. This is not a substitute for reaching out to as many as you can by phone to see how they are doing. However, prior to this pandemic nearly 80% of the U.S. population is on facebook—and that has likely gone up. This is a simple way to stay in touch and give people Christ's outreach and hope in a scary time.

There is also an intermediate social media primer if you already have or have mastered the basics, see it at <https://www.dowr.org/offices/missionary-discipleship/resources.html>.

This work does not need to be done by the pastor, but the pastor could delegate it to someone who loves social media. People who are on it a lot understand best practices and how it works. The pastor or a staff member should be checking in on what is posted regularly (daily in a circumstance like this).

IN BASIC: Make sure your parish has:

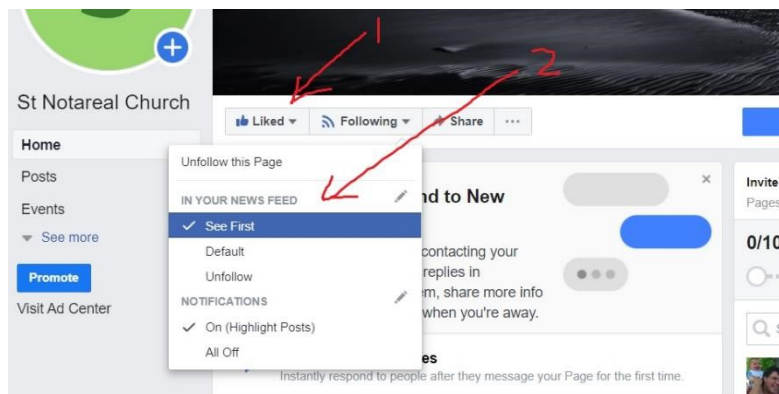
- 1) **A webpage with current information.** That means post a letter from the pastor regarding the severity of the situation, that there are no public masses, why that is, and include a link to the online Sunday mass hosted by the diocese (or if you are doing a livestream of your mass, where to watch it). Include information about confession and sacramental anointing. Include contact information. Include a link to your facebook page.
- 2) **A facebook page.** A facebook page is public; anyone with internet can see it. Facebook users can engage it. Use a picture of the Church for the profile picture and the cover (and there are other options, but be sure to have relevant pictures for the cover and profile!). Lots of things can be posted, but given the lack of direct access to Mass right now, make sure it is largely a spiritual outreach—simple ideas: a post with a line from the gospel of the day, a post that states (Fr. \_\_\_\_\_ and parish staff are praying for parish needs in the next hour. Does anyone want to add specific prayer intentions?) If you are connected with the needs of your community, using the facebook page for outreach is smart.
- 3) **Keep in mind if everyone in your parish \*needs\* to see something, email is more reliable than facebook.**

As for best basic facebook practices:

- 1) Some parishes use their facebook page as an event scrapbook. I would not encourage that at this time (or honestly—ever, at least as it's first purpose). Right now, with no events, we need to be **using facebook as an outreach in a crisis**. That means post items that are specific to our lived reality right now, as well as posts that are timeless (that is, God! Scripture!). Be positive in the sense that Christ is our hope, but real in that this is an incredibly hard time.
- 2) **Make the posts engaging.** End with a question for people to answer. For example:
  - a. "The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want." The psalm from Sunday's Mass is a powerful one every day, but it really hits home right now. People are worried about health, finances, more. Let's lift each other up. How was the Lord a good shepherd to

you today? ... then answer it in the comments, for you “I was so grateful for the sunshine—it lifted my spirits. Thank you, Lord.”

- b. “What is your favorite prayer in these challenging times? Let’s share and maybe learn some new options.” Then share your favorite prayer in the comments.
  - c. But be shy about sharing the power of God! (Scripture verses, stories of God’s provision in this time or in the past, etc.) People need to be reminded of that, and you may encourage people to share those posts as a hope for others in this time.
  - d. Occasional light humor is helpful when people are stressed as well. But make it occasional.
  - e. A post with a photo is exponentially more likely to be seen (thanks to facebook algorithms) . See the intermediate sheet on how to do that.
- 3) **Post 1-3 times a day.** If you don’t post once a day, fewer people see the facebook posts because of the facebook algorithm. If you post more than 3 times a day, you spread out your reach and that doesn’t always help. The most important piece here is to be consistent and do daily posting. Otherwise, facebook does not prioritize your posts. Sorry.
- 4) **Finally—this is a good time to encourage people to make the parish facebook posts a “see first” post.** How?
- a. Send an email (yes) that include a screenshot\* of your page that looks like this below, with instructions. Each person needs to click “Like” and THEN “Following.” Once you click Following, you will get that drop-down box. Under “In your news feed,” click “See first.” That way, people in your parish SHOULD see all your posts.
  - b. Then, create a facebook post on this with the same instructions and set it as an announcement on your parish facebook page. You do this by creating the post and then clicking on the three dots to the right, and then click on “Set as announcement.” That makes the post stick to the top of the page.



\*If you don’t know how to do a screenshot, it is worth asking for help. Each computer is a little different. But it is not hard once you know which button to push, and then paste that picture into an application like Microsoft Paint to crop it.

These are the basics. The Intermediate social media outreach sheet will get into more details to make your social media outreach more effective: <https://www.dowr.org/offices/missionary-discipleship/resources.html>.