

Dear Parish Family,

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9).

In light of the health crisis in our country and in the world, I am taking this time to write to you as your spiritual father about the measures we will be taking in our parish. Bishop Reed, in light of the CDC recommendations and Governor Abbott's declaration of a health disaster in Texas, has issued the following pastoral directives:

1. I strongly recommend that all Rectors and Vicars enforce social distancing as recommended by the CDC by offering the Eucharist on a virtual platform or in groups of less than 10 persons, with the necessary precautions being observed. We will provide a resource page where Sunday worship can be observed online. Churches that are offering Morning Prayer are encouraged to use online platforms as well.
2. Beginning today, March 19, 2020, I am Dispensing with the Obligation of our members to make their Communions until at least April 2, 2020.
3. All non-essential meetings are to be postponed until after Palm Sunday, April 5. Church support staff are encouraged to work from home as much as possible.
4. The Diocesan office will continue operations with a minimal staff, and the door will be locked during the day for safety reasons. Essential business will continue being conducted.
5. Baptisms can be done in emergency situations, but please keep me informed by email or phone call.
6. Burials must be graveside only and with as limited a family presence as possible with priest or deacon leading the prayers.
7. No weddings may take place without my consent and will require limitations for safety.

What does that mean for our parish?

1. There will be no public Eucharists until at least April 5 (Palm Sunday). We will live stream one Eucharist at 10:30 a.m. for the next two Sundays (March 22 and 29). You will be able to view this on our private Facebook page titled St. John's Parish Family. Contact Kathy Marugg if you need an invitation to join

this group. Our hope is to send out electronic copies of the Sunday bulletin and the Service Book for Lent. We will email these copies to those parishioners for whom we have email addresses.

2. Please avail yourself of the resources that the diocese is making available online for use in worship at home. These resources include links to parishes in our diocese who will be live streaming their Sunday morning and other liturgies as well as liturgical texts and prayers. You can find these by going to fwepiscopal.org and clicking on the link entitled "find worship services online."

3. Fr. Spencer will be recording a couple of videos about the importance of keeping Sunday as a holy day of worship, the spiritual benefits of priests saying private Masses on behalf of the entire parish, and what it means to make a spiritual communion. You will also be able to view these on our private parish Facebook page.

4. Fr. Spencer and I will administer the Eucharist (bread only) to anyone who would like to receive Monday through Friday between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m. using the shortened Eucharist liturgy normally used for communicating the sick. There will be a limit of 8 persons who can receive at one time. This service lasts about 10 minutes. Therefore, we can repeat this liturgy every 15 minutes for anyone who was not able to receive if the 8 person limit must be imposed.

5. Fr. Spencer and I will be very happy to bring you Communion at home if you do not wish to receive during the above times. Please call me at 325-998-8592 if you would like to schedule a visit. However, please remember that nursing homes and hospitals are either not allowing visitors or have very restricted visitation policies in place. For those parishioners in nursing homes or hospitals, we will be calling to check on you by phone. It is very important that your priests be contacted if anyone is seriously ill or if anyone needs last rites. Pastoral ministry to the sick and dying will not in any case be suspended.

6. All meetings, Bible studies, and social events are cancelled until at least April 2. This includes all Sunday morning classes, the Lenten study, Evensong and Spring cookout on March 22, the March Men's Breakfast, the fifth Sunday pot-luck lunch on March 29.

7. The Food Pantry will be closed until at least April 8.

8. We will continue to say Morning Prayer in the church Monday through Friday at 8:30 a.m.

9. Our plan right now is to live stream Stations of the Cross each Friday at 6:00 p.m. during Lent on our private parish Facebook page.

Please keep in mind that these temporary measures are an attempt by our Bishop and our diocese to approach this time of crisis with wisdom and care for our neighbors while sustaining the ministry of the Church. These steps are being taken to protect people and save lives which is God's command to love thy neighbor. In closing, let me leave you with Bishop Reed's wise recommendations on what we can be doing right now as we sustain the ministry of Christ's Church in our community and the world.

What can I do right now?

- First, follow the advice of health officials. Instructions vary in different communities, but everyone should stay home as much as possible and take other precautions. Even if you never feel sick, it is possible for you to pass this virus to others.
- Second, exercise your ministry as a disciple of Jesus by checking on your neighbors, senior and at-risk members of your congregation, and family members located in other parts of the country. Set up a daily check-in with your neighbors and vulnerable friends – just a text or wave out the window will do!
- Third, continue to give to your parish as you are able, and give also to your rector's benevolence fund as needs will be many in the coming weeks. You can keep up your pledge by mail, or make use of an online contribution system if your parish has one.
- And finally, pray. Pray for God power to intervene in this crisis. Pray for our nation to repent and to turn to God for help. Pray for your family, your neighbors, and the Church.

In Christ,

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