

SAINT NOEL PARISH

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17 March 2020
Saint Patrick, Bishop

Dear Parishioner,

I am sure nearly everyone has heard that after serious consideration of the grave health risk involved in public gatherings and in order to curb the spread of the coronavirus, the bishops of Ohio have decided, effective immediately, to suspend temporarily all publicly celebrated Masses and liturgies, at least through Holy Week and Easter. (This now moves beyond the date of April 3, the Friday before Palm Sunday).

The bishops of Ohio, therefore, dispense the Catholic faithful who reside in their respective dioceses and all other Catholics currently in Ohio from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass now and through Easter Sunday.

So much for a pastor's first Easter with his people!

This decision was not taken lightly and caused our bishops great sadness; however, after consultation with the governor and health officials they are convinced that this is the most prudent and necessary action. Science has proven that participation in public gatherings significantly increases the risk of contagion, posing a serious danger to those especially vulnerable.

As further directives were received from the Diocese this afternoon, I have made the decision to close the parish office and church until further notice.

At this time, our staff will work from their homes, as they are able. As a result, if you call the parish office, you will be directed through a series of prompts that will put you in touch with the staff member with whom you need to speak.

I stated last Sunday, we as a staff remain committed to your needs as a parishioner. If any one of us is unable to pick up at the time of your telephone call, if you would please leave a message, we will be happy to return your call as soon as possible. If you know of a parishioner who is experiencing a difficulty, or who you think would appreciate a call from us – please, let us know – and we will!

Every staff member continues to have access to their e-mail.

All classes, sessions, and meetings continue to be canceled regardless of the number of attendees or participants.

However, our food pantry (at this time) will remain open on Mondays and Thursdays. You are encouraged to donate to local foodbanks or *St. Vincent de Paul* societies, and to continue to be generous to the Church so that we can care for those in greatest need. Parishioners have been kind enough to drop off their offertory envelope. We are now asking that you mail it or utilize the direct deposit option. (We can get that form to you). We are working to create an online offertory feature on our website as well, as the parish continues to meet its financial obligations.

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are **not** permitted to take Holy Communion to the sick, for their good, and the good of their families.

As priests, we have been told that confessions are to be heard only in danger of death. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick can still be requested, too, but I imagine, should be done so in serious situations.

I have begun to be in dialogue with those couples who have weddings scheduled, and in addition to funerals, decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis; both of which, at this moment, can be celebrated with immediate family members only.

My brothers and sisters: remember to pray. Catholics have always joined together in prayer during times of crisis throughout the ages. We have ministered to the sick, attended to the dying, and buried the dead. May this unprecedented time in our history be a time we remember who we are and **whose** we are – disciples of Jesus Christ, crucified, and risen! May we continue to demonstrate love of God and of our neighbor.

As Pope Francis reminds us, we should be reaching out to our communities and praying in solidarity with the Church around the world. Last week, he composed a prayer, directed to the person of Mary, under the title, *“Health of the Sick.”* This prayer was made available to parishioners who happened to attend Mass this past weekend. It has subsequently been uploaded to our parish website, and I have asked that everyone who can read in your household, to pray this prayer daily.

(Writing it specifically with the people of Rome in mind, the line: *“Salvation of the Roman People,”* you might simply pray, *“Salvation of the People”*).

I will continue to celebrate Daily Mass privately and offer the Mass intention secured for the day. I began this morning with the celebration of Saint Patrick, and I will admit: I

teared up at the Eucharistic Prayer. Without any number of the faithful present, the words became especially moving and they were prayed with particular meaning.

As with all things, we tend not to realize what we have until it is gone. I imagine when we are all able to return to the public worship of our faith, we will gather with greater appreciation and more zeal for the gift first given to us at the moment of baptism.

In every Sunday Mass we celebrate the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord. The Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith. In this moment, we are experiencing in a unique way the passion of our Lord as this pandemic prevents us from gathering for our Sunday celebrations.

In this very difficult time, I encourage you, together with our bishops, urge you to turn to the Church's treasury of prayer.

Sunday does remain a holy day, and we are encouraged to pray using the rich resources of our faith. Read and reflect upon the readings, psalm, and gospel of the day. This might also include praying as a family or individually the rosary, a Divine Mercy chaplet, the Liturgy of the Hours (*there's an app for that*); Stations of the Cross, etc.

You are also encouraged to participate in prayer by way of radio broadcast or televised or livestreamed Mass and make a spiritual Communion.

This is an opportunity to get creative, grow closer as a family, and enter, perhaps more fully than we ever have before, all that this Lenten season is preparing us for – the renewal of our baptismal promises at Easter! We remain a hopeful people, an Easter people!

May God bless you and all those you hold dear in this life.

Happy Saint Patrick's Day! I think, now, I'm going to go enjoy a Guinness at the rectory. So, *sláinte!* And as they say in the pubs of Ireland at the end of the night: "**Safe home!**"

Love and prayers.

Your pastor,
Fr. Terry