

CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES OF CHEROKEE AND HOLSTEIN

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL PARISH

709 W Cedar Street

517 Mueller Street

PO Box 658

PO Box 380

Cherokee, Iowa 51012-0658

Holstein, Iowa 51025-0380

712-225-4606

712-368-4755

20 February 2021

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

To all parishioners of IC-Cherokee and OLGC-Holstein:

GREETINGS

As always, everyone continues to be in my prayers and thoughts during this difficult time which is a stressful time for many of us as we cannot do what we normally do in order to promote the safety and wellbeing of the community. We are all in this together, including the frustrations, challenges, and “pandemic fatigue.” Together, “one day at a time” while physically distanced, we will get through this. I continue to ask God for peace and strength for all of us.

Please share this update with persons who do not have internet access or who are not receiving these weekly updates and let them know that they too are in my prayers and thoughts during this time.

Please invite family and friends to check the parish website, especially <https://cherokeecountycatholics.org/covid-19-info> for current information regarding public Masses, private prayer times, and celebration of the other Sacraments being done according to parish, diocesan, CDC, and liturgical protocols along with additional information including all information issued since 13 March 2020; and our Facebook page [[CatholicCommunitiesOfCherokeeAndHolstein,Iowa](#)] for the latest news, online broadcasts, and to donate online or mail the donations to us.

CURRENT EVENTS

With the pastoral planning that has been taking place in our Diocese since 2015 and before, Bishop Nickless informed the priests of the Diocese many years ago that ‘pastor terms’ were gone, and each priest needed to be willing to move on a moment’s notice. We saw this happen when in January 2018 Fr. Dan Guenther was transferred to other parishes. Several weeks ago, due to continuing pastoral planning and the upcoming retirement of four [4] priests [Msgr. Duchaine at Merville/Kingsley/Anthon, Fr. Ball at Ida Grove/Mapleton/Danbury, Fr. Schrad at Estherville/Armstrong, and Fr. Girres at Algona/Whittemore/West Bend/Bode], the Bishop informed all priests to be ready to move and that twelve [12] priests would receive phone calls from him to announce a new assignment based on recommendations from his Personnel Board.

As I announced last Saturday, on Sunday February 7, before Super Bowl LV, the bishop called me, to my surprise, to announce that I was being promoted from Vice-Chancellor to Chancellor of the Diocese with duties at his office in Sioux City and will become the Parochial Vicar of Mater Dei Parish in Sioux City. Out of obedience to the bishop, as I vowed at my ordination, I have accepted the new assignment that is effective 7 July 2021. It is with mixed emotions that I depart, as I love the people of these parishes and had hoped to accomplish much in our journey together. Yet I see new opportunities for me to serve other people of the Diocese of Sioux City and to serve the Bishop in an expanded role.

The bishop has appointed Fr. Dan Rupp, current pastor of Mater Dei Parish in Sioux City and native son of Cherokee to be the new pastor beginning July 7th. I have already spoken with Fr. Dan of the great work we are doing here and where we are in our Pastoral Planning process. When Fr. Dan was appointed to Mater Dei in 2017, the two parishes of Nativity and Immaculate Conception had just been merged into a new parish. Since then, Fr. Dan had done great work to unite the parishes and move the parishes from maintenance to mission focused. Fr. Dan will bring these skills here as we continue to work to complete the first stage of our Pastoral Plan to become one parish.

As we enter the First Week of Lent, one of the calls of Lent is to “take up your cross and follow Me.” Attached to this newsletter is a prayer service that can be done in the home as we make a commitment to obey and follow Christ.

PASTORAL PLANNING FOR OUR FUTURE AND FOR EVANGELIZATION

The CCOCH Ministry 2025 Team is conducting a survey at <https://cherokeecountycatholics.org/ministry-2025> to seek parishioners input regarding two options we have regarding merging the two parishes. Please visit this page for more information. One survey per adult in the household is permitted. For those without internet access, please call Denise for a paper copy. The survey is open until Sunday February 28.

Across the diocese other parishes groupings are in the same process to merge parishes to help us to become a stronger diocese. And the Bishop’s new Maintenance to Mission Task Force is preparing resources for the Diocese to help us to become more missionary in our evangelization of our parishioners, to be faithful to the teachings of Christ and His Church [including obedience to our Pope and Bishop], to work more closely together, and to focus more on our faith as being a parish is not about coming to Mass once a week. It is about being faithful members of the Church and taking seriously our baptismal call to help evangelize the world.

Again, for more information, please visit the Ministry 2025 page on the website and review many issues of The Lumen and the Bishop’s pastoral letter issued in 2009.

CURRENT STATUS OF PUBLIC MASSES, PROTOCOLS, AND COVID

The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Day Masses for all Catholics of the DIOCESE OF SIOUX CITY continues until further notice. However, we are not dispensed from practicing our faith. Please see SUNDAY AND HOLY DAY MASSES and FAITH FORMATION sections below.

Since we shut down on 16 March 2020 and reopened on 26 June 2020 for public Masses, following protocols for the safe celebration of the Sacraments, we have had several updates from Bishop Nickless and his COVID Task Force and Office of Worship. I have announced these when they became public and with the help of staff, the IC Liturgy Team, and the Pastoral Council for each parish, directives have been put into place at each parish.

Beginning on Passion Sunday, 27 March 2021, we are permitted to have a choir of up to eight [8] members [with rehearsals not to begin before 14 March 2021], Altar Servers, and simple liturgical

processions in and out of Mass with only the priest[s], deacon, and Altar Server[s]. Congregational singing continues to remain forbidden to curtail the spread of the virus.

I have spoken with Charlotte and Joyce G. about these modifications and I plan to resume with one Altar Server beginning March 27 who will carry the Processional Cross and ring the 'Consecration Bell'. Starting that weekend, we will also resume with the use of Readers.

This will be one step to moving back to normal.

Yet, we will continue to monitor the status of the pandemic and if we need to pull back in either or both parishes and across the diocese, we will pull back, so we continue to be able to celebrate the Sacrament safely.

I will be issuing and publishing updated protocols, Phase 3, by mid-March.

Not changing is the requirement that all persons attending any celebration of the Sacraments, including Sunday and weekday Masses need to wear face masks with physical distancing between households, and hand sanitizing. Ushers, who were trained in May, will continue to welcome attendees, take attendance, strategically seat attendees so we may accommodate as many people as possible within our limited seating protocols [attendees are kindly asked to sit where directed by ushers to help accommodate other attendees], and dismiss attendees. Attendees who do not comply will be asked to leave and may be not permitted to return until they agree to comply with Diocesan protocols. Thank you to our ushers who assist at every Mass to take attendance and assist with the safe celebration of the Eucharist. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

The church buildings are only open for 30 minutes before Masses and during limited designated times of private prayer. Person arriving after the start time of Mass may not be admitted per current COVID protocols. Ushers are trained to maintain a secure environment.

The parish offices remain closed to the public. If you need to meet with me or any staff member, please call first. Face masks are required in the office as they are required for attending Masses, funerals, weddings, etc. on parish property. No one is permitted to enter our buildings [including CAP at Cherokee] and to attend Mass and other events in the parishes of the Diocese of Sioux City without a face mask with a few exceptions along with 6' physical [social] distancing between households, regular/frequent hand washing/sanitizing, and covering the mouth with the inner elbow whenever coughing or sneezing even while wearing a face mask.

Regarding COVID, I obtain my data from the Diocesan COVID Task Force, <https://iowacovid19tracker.org/>, and <https://coronavirus.iowa.gov/>. Yesterday, the numbers reported on the Iowa government's website greatly increased due to a large data upload that would include data from several or more months and the Positivity Rate report was removed. Thus, my report will look a little different as some of the data I have been reporting, is not being reported by the State of Iowa.

This past week the rate of infections in our area appear to have continued to decline and we are at levels we saw last summer before the spike in November and December. As of 19 February 2021, there are 30 active COVID cases in Cherokee County [42 last week], 46 active cases in Ida County [63 last week], included in the 18,690 active cases in Iowa [22,405 a week ago] with a declining number of

hospitalizations, use of ICUs, and ventilators for COVID patients in the state of Iowa. These are reported numbers. Unknown are the untested cases. The Diocesan COVID Task Force and others remain focused on the number of hospitalizations that indicate the current status of the virus and monitor the spread of the 'UK', 'South Africa', and 'Brazil' variants.

I report these numbers, not to scare anyone, but to encourage every one to be cautious due to the uncertainties of this virus and because no one can afford to become ill.

SUNDAY AND HOLY DAY MASSES

It is vitally important for every member of our Church to attend Sunday and Holy Masses, even if it is by watching the celebration of the Mass on a computer, smart phone, or on TV. We also know that watching Mass online or on TV is not the same as doing so in person. Yet attending Mass [even online] is important to remain connected to our Church and to the message of Jesus. That is why we encourage 'online' attendees to treat the time as sacred as if you were attending in-person by your posture [sitting, standing, kneeling], listening, and responding. Thank you to those who 'tune' into Mass online. For the broadcast of the Sunday Mass of February 14, there were 82 [February 7 = 52] views. This Sunday's Mass will be the 200th livestream broadcast since I began doing this on 19 March 2021.

Last weekend we attendance was: 5:00 p.m. = 21, 8:30 a.m. = 43, and 10:30 a.m. = 48. Capacity of our churches are approximately 80 at IC and 60 at OLGC depending on the size of households which attend.

Please visit <https://cherokeecountycatholics.org/mass-attendance-reservations> [under the LITURGY menu] by Saturdays 3:00 p.m. to use our reservation system to help accommodate people for public Sunday Masses reserve your seat[s]. Reservations are not required, yet encouraged. We will do our best to accommodate reservations.

The Masses held at Cherokee [Saturday evening and Tuesday and Thursday mornings] are live streamed on our parish website and are available for reply until the next live broadcast.

FAITH FORMATION-YOUTH

In-person youth Faith Formation classes will be held February 10 at both parishes with Group B of grades K, 2, 3, 4, and 7 at IC and grades K-12 at OLGC. Parents are asked to review the protocols for in-person Faith Formation classes.

Information for each class level may be found at <https://cherokeecountycatholics.org/faith-formation> under each parish's program and grade level.

Online learning opportunities will continue on the parishes' website including a pre-recorded Family Faith Formation video at <https://cherokeecountycatholics.org/family-faith-formation> which will continue the program and topics we began in December. The topic for February is "WHAT DOES JESUS DO FOR US? Christ our Savior, Intercessor and Judge."

Parents are encouraged to continue being the first educators of their children by "attending Mass online" each Sunday, and if possible on weekdays, and to read Bible stories and utilize good Catholic

books and resources including the abundant selection of material available on our website, on FORMED.ORG, and at other great Catholic websites.

FAITH FORMATION-ADULT

One of the goals of our Diocesan pastoral planning is to create more vibrant parishes. A parish is more than a church building or a group of people who attend Mass on Sundays. A parish is about a group of people who are disciples of Jesus who evangelize their families and communities daily in who they are and what they say and do. Did you know there are many places on our website to learn more about our faith? Using [Formed.org](https://formed.org) is another great resource. Instructions to sign up are found at <https://cherokeecountycatholics.org/adult-faith-formation>

Please learn what the Church teaches about the Gospel of Jesus Christ including love for God and neighbor and become more faithful disciples of Jesus so we may evangelize and create the world in which God intended us to live.

TECHNOLOGY MATTERS

Occasionally we experience internet connection issues during live broadcasts. I apologize for any inconveniences the loss of the internet causes. Soon, YouTube will be allowing advertisements to be shown before and during replays of the YouTube videos on the parish website, including videos of our Masses.

We are using ParishCast to send email messages to all parishioners for which we have a valid email thanks to generous supporters of our parishes. The 'attachments' are links to documents and when clicked upon, a new web browser window opens to display the document. This week's 'attachments', including the bulletin, are at the bottom of this message. Using this system also allows us to see who opens and does not open the email message and learn of invalid email addresses.

Last Saturday's message was sent to 352 parishioners with seven [7] "bouncing", 190 parishioners opening the email, 155 not opening the email, and 64 clicking through the email.

Occasionally, we hear from parishioners reporting not receiving this weekly e-newsletter. Sometimes, as this is an email sent to over 350 addresses, some internet/email providers and email programs see such messages as spam and will send it to spam/junk folders or quarantine it. If you hear of persons not receiving these weekly messages, please suggest they check their spam/junk folders or contact their internet/email providers to see if this message was quarantined or ask the person to contact the parish office to ensure we have the correct email address. If you change your email address, please notify the parish office so we may update our list and you may receive regular e-mail communications.

CONTRIBUTIONS/DONATIONS/FINANCES

Thank you to everyone who are offering their donations/contributions via the postal service [please use the appropriate PO Box number when mailing to your parish] or <https://cherokeecountycatholics.org/online-giving>.

If you wish to see your contribution record before any time of the year, you may visit your parish membership account at <https://siouxcity.parishsoftfamilysuite.com/>. If you have not yet signed up, you may visit <https://siouxcity.parishsoftfamilysuite.com/Register.aspx> [More information please refer to the letter included with last Saturday's e-newsletter and the one issued a year ago to all parishioners.]

I continue to remain in contact with the Finance Council for each parish including updating them on the current financial status of each parish.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Is currently available by appointment only. We are preparing spaces at each parish church location to resume regular celebration of the Sacrament in all parishes in the Diocese of Sioux City as long as we find a space that allows for a 6' distance between priest and penitent with a proper barrier, no sitting or kneeling, and the proper privacy.

DISINFECTING THE PARISH FACILITIES

A handheld electrostatic sprayer is being used in each parish to help speed up the process of disinfecting our facilities after use when the facility will be used within forty-eight [48] hours including after the Saturday evening Mass in Cherokee, the Sunday Mass at Holstein, and after the first session of youth Faith Formation classes on Wednesdays in Holstein.

PRAYERS

We continue to pray for the more than 2,453,927+ persons in our world, including 500,833+ persons in our country, including 5,336 in the state of Iowa [including thirty-five (35) in Cherokee County, thirty-two (32) in Ida County, and two [2] retired diocesan priests – Fr. John Vakulskas (9/28/20) and Msgr. Thomas Donahoe (11/5/20)] who have died with COVID-19 and for people affected by the evils of this world, including racism and abortion.

I know this is a difficult time. However, we will get through this due to our faith.

Again, please be assured of my prayers and support and I thank you for your prayers, support, understanding, and cooperation.

Peace,

Fr. Mark

Bulletin: x, also at <https://cherokeecountycatholics.org/bulletins>

This Message: x also at <https://cherokeecountycatholics.org/covid-19-info>

Other: "Take Up Your Cross"