



SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for your patience with the delay of this letter. Every time a draft was finished, protocol changed and the letter immediately became outdated. Please be assured, though, that while circumstances have evolved, and our response and thus this letter to our parishes has needed to change and evolve, two things have not changed in this time- our love for you as your parishes, and Christ's love for you as your Creator and Savior. Christ Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and He reigns forever.

As most of you are well aware at this point, all parish and school events have been cancelled. Bishop Bradley has made the very difficult decision, along with all the other bishops of the United States, to cancel the public celebration of the Mass up until Holy Week. He has not made any decisions about Easter yet. Given the governor's orders, it is likely that Easter will be celebrated privately, but please continue to check in for more information. While we are not permitted to join together for the public celebration of Mass for the time being, please know that your priests are still offering private Masses and prayers for you every single day!

While public celebration of the Mass is not permitted and our personnel working day to day in our parishes are restricted, we are making every effort to keep our churches sanitized and open for prayer. Now more than ever we need to pray for God's grace, guidance, healing, and forgiveness for our nation and world! Confessions will also continue to be heard in our parishes with as little interruption to the usual schedule as possible. Anointing of the Sick is still being offered as it always has- please do not hesitate to give us a call if a family member gets seriously injured or ill- as of right now, all the facilities in the area will still allow priests to visit in cases of urgent need, so please don't worry about access concerns. We are still here for you.

Along with many other parishes throughout our diocese, Fr. Adams will be livestreaming Sunday Mass. It will be at 9:00 AM, so please check out the St. John and Bernard's Facebook page for more information and to tune in. Fr. McNally is also planning to start posting reflections once or twice a week to the St. Joseph, Saint Joseph website, so please check back in so we can try to stay in touch and share news, reflections, and maybe a short homily here and there. Other ministries are also working to stay in touch with parishioners- Chad is keeping in touch with our youth group families with regular reflections. We are all striving to do our part to help you to stay connected with your faith. Social distancing does not mean spiritual distancing- if anything, if we're living our faith well, this is a time which should draw us closer to one another!

Please, even if we do not see each other in person for a little while, know of our continued prayers for you as our parishioners, and please do your part to set aside time for prayer as a family and to pray for us as your priests! Take the time to read from the Scriptures on Sundays together. Even if you cannot receive our Lord in the Eucharist for a little while, still make regular acts of spiritual communion asking Jesus to be with you. Offer together the Divine Mercy Chaplet or Pope Francis' Prayer in the Time of the Coronavirus at 3:00, the Hour of Mercy. We've attached both prayers for your convenience. And then check out the various prayer resources on our websites.

There is a lot out there to keep us supported and nourished in this desert time in our faith. As we are separated from so much of our usual routine, take the opportunity to live our faith in love for our families and for one another, too. This is a time of great stress, anxiety, and impatience for many of us, which forces us to have to be even more patient with one another. Many of our families are developing a newfound respect for homeschooling parents! But even just a few weeks ago, how often did we hear parents and families lament how busy our lives are and how little quality time they have together. Perhaps God, who in His infinite goodness is able to bring great blessings out of the evils of our lives, intends to use this as an opportunity to hear and answer those prayers and slow our lives down just a bit to remember and focus again on the things and people that are most important to us.

And as we tend to our own health and to the health of our families, may we also be mindful of those outside of our immediate families in this time. One of the things which set apart the early Christian community from their pagan neighbors was their attentiveness to the sick and the poor, to the widows and orphans. As we are asked to isolate ourselves from one another in prudential ways, this is going to be a time of great anxiety for many, and a time of great loneliness for others. Please check up on your relatives, your friends, your neighbors, the lady on the end of the block who lives by herself. If you are concerned about coming into physical contact, you don't need to enter their house- ring a doorbell and say hi. Give them a phone call. Our nursing homes have closed themselves off to outside visitors. Perhaps consider taking a few minutes with your kids and writing a letter to an anonymous lonely resident. Consider opportunities to make masks for our hardworking medical personnel at the hospital.

In all the various ways we can be supporting one another in this time, please also give a thought to your support for us as your parishes. Like some of our families, our parishes depend on each and every collection, especially on major holidays. We've made great strides in our parishes this year in tightening our belts and trying to be good stewards of the funds we receive, but the loss of three weeks' worth of collections or, heaven forbid, our Easter collections would mean not even being able to make payroll for the small handful of employees we have, and we have been adamant that we will continue to support our employees in this time. How can we demand that of others if we as a church do not do it ourselves? But that means that bills and payroll must be paid, whether Sunday Mass occurs or not. Please prayerfully consider mailing in your envelope or dropping it off at our office, even if you are not able to be present with us at Mass on Sunday. All our websites also have easy instructions for online giving; perhaps this would be a good time to consider switching over!

And as we encourage your support for one another and humbly ask for your continued support for us, to bring this letter full circle please know that we are here for you, too. If you find yourself scared or in need, please don't hesitate to call. We have been in regular contact with Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Kalamazoo and are proud to be one of the few groups of parishes in our diocese partnering with them directly in this time to be a hub for charitable giving and community outreach. While we must be prudent and safe in how we do it, now more than ever the world needs to see the love of Christ through us as His disciples! We will be a reminder to all that Christ is still active in our world, when they struggle to find Him in the darkness. Because He IS still active in our world, He IS still with us as His people. Trust in that. The Church has seen all manner of illnesses and disasters come and go, but we still remain. God is with us and He will see us through this, too. Please be assured of our continued support and prayers, as well as those of Fr. Patrick and Fr. Arul.

In Christ through Mary,

Fr. James Adams and Fr. Thomas McNally
Co-pastors of Watervliet, Benton Harbor, Saint Joseph, and Stevensville

"Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." –Philippians 4:6-7

"Pray, Hope, and don't worry." – St. Padre Pio

*"Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you.
All things are passing away; God never changes.
Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing.
God alone suffices." – St. Theresa of Avila*

Prayer from Pope Francis to Our Blessed Mother in Time of Coronavirus

O Mary,
you always shine on our path
as a sign of salvation and of hope.
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,
who at the cross took part in Jesus' pain, keeping your faith firm.
You know what we need,
and we are sure you will provide
so that, as in Cana of Galilee,
we may return to joy and to feasting
after this time of trial.
Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform to the will of the Father
and to do as we are told by Jesus,
who has taken upon Himself our sufferings
and carried our sorrows
to lead us, through the cross,
to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.

Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God. Do not disdain the entreaties of
we who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen.

Two Acts of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus,
I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment
receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite
myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

I wish, my Lord, to receive You
With the purity, humility, and devotion
With which your most holy mother received You,
With the spirit and fervor of the saints. Amen.