



## SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

220 Church Street

St. Joseph, MI 49085

Phone (269) 983-1575 Fax (269) 983-7798

My Fellow Saint Joseph Parishioners,

Welcome Back! It has been so good to see many of you over the last month as we have entered back into the public celebration of Mass once again. Our first weekend we had nearly three hundred people join us at one of our seven weekend Masses, and our numbers have continued to rise from there. I am very much looking forward to seeing many more of you in the weeks to come.

It had been ten long weeks that we were apart during the pandemic, but please be assured that things were far from quiet here at your humble parish while you were away! Just a sampling of what went on over this time:

\*Fr. Adams and I began our sheltering-in-place with a Eucharistic procession around our Saint Joseph and Benton Harbor parishes, community, and school as we asked God's protection on our people through the offering of the Church's formal prayer against plague and pandemic (yes, there actually is one!).

\*Over the ten weeks which followed, we had roughly 160 private Masses offered for your intentions by our parish priests. Though we were not able to be together in person for Holy Week and Easter, we had well more than 1,000 families that tuned in to join us for our collaborative Easter celebrations which were livestreamed from St. John's in Benton Harbor. Hundreds of families have tuned in every week since then to join us for Sunday Mass and for our Thursday morning Mass for the Lake Michigan Catholic students. Many more joined together for rosaries and other prayers via Zoom and Google hangouts.

\*We heard 65 hours of confessions and offered 40 hours of adoration in the downtown church, which had its doors open for more than 800 hours of private prayer. I hope you had the chance to stop in at some point, because our church was especially beautiful this Easter season!

\*We made numerous sick calls to the hospital and to people's homes, celebrated a few baptisms, a couple very modest weddings, a couple funerals, and several graveside committal services.

\*Our parish had a team of very generous volunteers who called every family in the parish (at least those for whom we had an up to date phone number, so if you don't think you received a call, please let our office know so we can update your contact information!)

\*We had another team of very generous volunteers who assisted us in our work with Catholic Charities to distribute nearly 30,000 pounds of food to needy families in our county over the ten weeks we were closed for the pandemic! This work still continues into the present, so please give us a call and let us know if you would like to help us unpack or deliver some of that food to needy in the area! And though they had to close their doors for a while during the pandemic, the members of our St. Vincent de Paul Society were still on call to assist me on a case-by-case basis in helping the homeless and needy who stopped by the rectory looking for assistance, and they are preparing to engage in ministry once again for the needy in our area.

\*The directors of religious education in our parish collaborative worked hard to continue to offer programs for our students and bible studies for our adults online and through other socially-distanced media, and I know of several other groups in our parish that had made efforts to do the same for their members.

Even in the absence of parish meetings, social gatherings, and public Mass, our parish has continued the work of the Church in the service of God and His people. And now the time has come to begin the process of returning to some semblance of normalcy in the work that is at the core of our very being as Catholics- the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

I would encourage everyone to read the guidelines and pastoral letter that Bishop Bradley has published for all the faithful of the Diocese of Kalamazoo, which can be found both on our website and the diocesan one. If you haven't had a chance to see it already, I also made a video explaining the way in which we as a parish have implemented the necessary changes so as to be able to offer public Mass safely and reverently again. For those of you who have not had a chance to access those yet or who have difficulty doing so, I will lay out the key points here, as well. First, we have been asked to hold off on restarting any social events or non-essential business meetings for the time being. Prayer and the celebration of the sacraments may continue, but our parish groups are being asked not to meet on parish grounds until further notice.

As far as Mass itself is concerned, Bishop Bradley has extended the general dispensation from our obligation to attend Sunday Mass until September 6, 2020. If you are in good health and not in a high-risk demographic, please do your best to join us for Mass again. The graces of the Mass are there to get us through the week spiritually- we need them. I need them. And there is no sense in risking spiritual laziness and sickness if you can safely attend without risking physical sickness. If you are sick, elderly, immunocompromised, or otherwise fear that attendance of Mass would be a risk to your health or to that of others, then please be at peace and know that you are under no obligation to attend Mass with us at least through September 6<sup>th</sup>. St. John's will continue to livestream the 9:00 AM Sunday morning Mass from their Facebook and Youtube channel and I would encourage you to avail yourself of that opportunity and plan to join us in prayer from home for the time being.

For those who are able to join us once again, please be assured that we're doing our best to keep this experience as safe as possible for all involved. Our church is being cleaned daily by staff along with volunteers who are assisting us with disinfecting between each weekend Mass. Bishop Bradley has also asked that all our ministers and the members of the congregation wear masks to Mass as an act of charity for the others attending with us.

We have also been asked to space out our churches to allow for social distancing. I think you will find it to be a very intuitive design and practice, and most of our Mass-goers have settled into the new routine very quickly. In practice, please be aware that this means that each church will only be able to hold roughly 25% of its total capacity. Sadly, once we've hit that cap, we cannot accept any further entries into that particular Mass and we would have to ask you to try to join us at another time. Recognizing the inconvenience that could cause for many, the priests of our collaborative are providing specific Masses with plenty of overflow seating so you can be assured that you will never be turned away from those particular Masses, or that if you are turned away from another Mass, you have a guaranteed Plan B.

The 5:00 PM Saturday and the 11:00 AM Sunday at St. Bernard's in Benton Harbor will have plenty of overflow seating, as well as accommodations for listening in from your car in the parking lot. Here at St. Joe, our 4:00 PM Saturday and 9:00 AM Sunday Masses at St. Joe South in Stevensville have been transitioned into outdoor Masses. Parishioners are welcome to park near the entrance of the lot, bring lawn chairs, and place them in the designated spaces on the side lawn to attend Mass in the open air, or they can choose to park toward the back of the lot, remain in their cars, and either roll down the windows to listen or even tune in from your FM radio in the car! The ushers present prior to Mass will be happy to assist you in arranging either means of attending.

We recognize our parishioners are in different levels of comfort with this whole process of returning to Mass and with entering back into social company in general, so we are trying to be as accommodating as possible while still keeping this process simple. And because these days have been confusing enough as it is, unless you explicitly hear otherwise, **ALL MASS AND CONFESSION TIMES AND PLACES ARE UNCHANGED**. That is one thing that has not changed in the least bit. Our hope is that the many offerings available to you allow you to come back home and receive the sacraments once again in whatever way is most comfortable for you at present, while still doing this all in a way that maintains reverence and decorum. Because Mass on television is a lovely support to our devotional life when that's all we have available to us, but it is a very poor long term solution. The practice of our faith is communal and it is done in person, and we must persist even in these difficult times to find ways to bring us back together again in works of charity, in the sacraments, and in the worship of Almighty God around the altar each Sunday.

Please be assured that Monsignor Sears, Father Arul, Father Emmanuel, Father Craig, Father Adams, and I have all been praying for you. Please continue to pray for us and for one another in these times of trial, as well. God's grace will get us through as it always has. Know that you are loved.



In Christ,

Fr. Thomas McNally, Pastor of Saint Joseph Parish, Saint Joseph, MI