



Message from Regional Administrator/Rector

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THANK YOU... To all parishioners that continue to help and support each other as we deal with these challenging and unprecedented times. Your dedication to our parish family by maintaining, as much as feasible, your financial support of the parish throughout this pandemic is appreciated. Your regular contributions either in the collection basket, through the mail or via online giving have maintained the fiscal solvency of our parish. Again, **THANK YOU** for all of your financial and spiritual support.

For almost all of 2020 the world has been confronted by and trying to deal with the COVID-19 virus pandemic. The early spikes brought confusion, concern, discouragement, anxiety and fear among people. The increase of these spikes once again has contributed more stress, fear and anxiety because we are also dealing with the 'fatigue' produced by the prolong conditions of this threat to our health and well being. It seems that even with a vaccine on the horizon, we will probably be dealing with our face masks, six feet of distance between people, and the reminder to wash and sanitize your hands often for quite some time in the future. We also ask that if you utilize the restrooms available in our church buildings, please use the small spray sanitizer provided on all surfaces you touch before you leave the room. (You only need to spray the surface; no need to wipe it down).

THANK YOU . . . to all of you who attend our Masses and other worship and devotional events in our church and are faithfully following the restrictive guidelines required to combat the Coronavirus so we can keep each other safe. You have been amazing in your flexibility and response.

THANK YOU . . . to all of you who have been unable to attend worship liturgies and activities in person but join us online. And for those of you who are without internet but who are in need of prayers and materials to keep you connected to the community and to be engaged deeply with Our Lord, our bulletins and information can be sent to you. Please contact our pastoral assistant, Sr. Regina Gertrude Aman, at (716) 372-4841, ext. 17 and let her know your needs.

This Christmas Season brings us some additional challenges. The state and county governments and the CDC Christmas guidelines & regulations will more than likely be determined during the next couple weeks once the data has been gathered from the transmission and spiking of the virus from Thanksgiving and in the following weeks. Although our plans and your responses to the epidemic have been effective to date, protective plans are needed and are now being made about Christmas. In making any plans, we must remember the structure we put in place is dependent upon the rate of the activity of the virus and its effects on our communities. Please refer to page 5 of the bulletin to examine our Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and part of the Christmas Season Schedule. You will notice that there are a variety of Christmas Services being provided. We have added additional Masses to help those of you that are able or wish to attend in person. A special Family Mass in the Basilica at 2:00 pm as a Vigil for Christmas on Christmas Eve as a liturgy, a Christmas Eucharist celebration, has been recommended to help with reducing some of the typically crowded Masses. Keep watch as St. Nick may make an appearance! We also increased the number of Masses that will be LIVE-streamed.

This pandemic is very fluid and if there is a significant spike in the spread of the virus and if the county goes into Code Orange or Red, there may be the government orders for no public gatherings out of concern for the public welfare. Please check the parish website at www.smaolean.org (scroll down to Parish News on the home-page or contact the office staff if you lack online capability. Please realize that the Christmas Services have a limit in the number of people that can occupy the church. The limit is based on six feet of distance between people of different households. In order to maintain control of the numbers of individuals and households in the church, remember to make your reservations early. Reservations for Christmas Eve and Christmas need to be made by noon on December 18th for a particular service. Since the 4:00 pm Vigil Mass at the Basilica is often very popular with increased attendance, those without reservations will be seated up to our restricted capacity by a first come, first served basis. For the 4:00 pm Mass, there will be a LIVE-streamed Mass from the Centennial Hall in the lower Church where the overflow crowd can experience the Mass LIVE. Communion will be distributed to all those in the Centennial Hall.**

**** IMPORTANT NOTE:** In keeping with added precautions based on state, county and Diocesan recommendations and guidelines, reservations from those family and friends traveling from another state cannot be accepted for our reservation lists as they are required to quarantine for 14 days or to receive a negative COVID-19 test three days before arriving in New York and we would be unable to verify these deemed necessary public health and safety guidelines. Please offer them our love, support and our prayers and Christmas Season blessings and remind them that they could join us on LIVE-stream.

When the pandemic began, the Bishop granted a dispensation from Mass participation, especially for those members of the population whom the CDC classifies as “vulnerable” to the virus. This dispensation allows for creative adaptations in order to respond to the health and spiritual needs of parishioners, especially those who are being cautious in public settings. Let it be clear that the Eucharist is the center of Catholic worship; but with this pandemic there is an attentiveness to protect vulnerable members of the population and to limit public exposure in order to reduce the spread of the virus. Anyone whose general health has been compromised because of age, physical condition or illness should remain at home. Again, you can call Sr. Regina and material can be sent to you for your Christmas prayer time.

THANK YOU all for your understanding, support and encouragement during these unusual and challenging times. Please do know that your safety and security are of our utmost concern when we worship the Lord together as we celebrate His birth and our salvation.

During this time of *hope and anticipation*, we ask Our Lord to help us feel His presence and His peace in a special way. Let us remember as we take this journey during this Advent season, we so deeply believe that the Lord is Near! The knowledge of the Lord’s presence brings us great joy this Christmas and always.

+ We thank our regional Vicar, Fr. James Vacco for his contributions to this note.

God’s blessings and His graces,

