



East Lansing Catholic Community
elcatholics.org



UPDATE FROM THE PASTOR - FR. GORDON

May 29, 2020

Spring is in bloom and summer is fast approaching! It is with hopeful excitement that I write to you today! There are signs of rebirth in our Catholic community too! I want to share our tentative parish plans for June and July as we hope to slowly re-open our facilities for public Masses and other parish events. Plus the staff would also like to share what they've been doing and now hope to do moving forward.

At this time—as our plans can change from day-to-day based on whether we are winning or losing the battle against the coronavirus—I ask you to stay tuned for updates and to reach out to those who might not be registered or receiving this news. Just to review, there are lots of ways that we've been sharing information over the past few weeks. See our parish website (www.ELCatholics.org) for the weekly bulletin, videos, updates from me, and daily devotions. Or update your contact information through the parish website and give us your email address so we can keep you informed. Plus, we have several Facebook pages available on our elcatholics.org homepage and even a YouTube channel, "East Lansing Catholics." And for the many who are not following us on-line, I am hoping to mail a monthly staff newsletter (like this one) to keep us connected over the summer.

What's Next? The bishop has given us permission to resume public Masses on the weekend of Pentecost, May 30-31, at 25% capacity. This will happen even though the governor has extended the shelter-in-place order to June 12. After roping off every other row and removing chairs, hymnals and other hard-to-sanitize objects, St. Thomas now has a capacity of 240 and St. Johns of 140. Not knowing what our attendance numbers are going to be at first, I am hoping that we won't overflow our new lower capacity limits. For this reason, I am not going to have people sign-up to attend Mass, as this doesn't work well for those who aren't on-line. Just come as you are able, and, if we get too crowded, we will ask some people to come back at another time. Please don't be angry if this happens but consider coming to another liturgy.

The bishop has dispensed us from our Sunday Mass obligation until Labor Day at least. So if you are at risk due to age, compromised immune system, or are experiencing symptoms of sickness, by all means, please stay home. The bishop's dispensation from Sunday attendance, also allows you come attend any day of the week if you are up to it to receive the Eucharist. We will clean the churches between Masses and take all reasonable precautions, but there is always a risk of infection when we gather with others. Please help us mitigate the risk by following the guidelines explained in detail later in this letter.

Our first public Masses will be as follows on Pentecost weekend (May 30/31): St. Thomas – Saturday Vigil at 4:30pm and Sunday Masses at 9am and 11am. St. John – Sunday Masses at 8am, 10am, Noon and 7pm. My first priority is to recover our usual weekend Mass schedule (minus the 5pm Sunday Mass as MSU is out of session).

My second priority is to **continue our Outreach and livestream Masses** for all those who don't feel safe

attending just yet. The need to start slowly due to the virus and to continue broadcasting daily Mass leads to a short-term change of schedule for the summer. For June and July, we will continue to livestream Mass at 9am each weekday (Monday – Saturday) and rotate our Sunday livestream between the 8am St. John and 9am St. Thomas Masses. As much as I want to restore the other daily Masses, we need to start slowly, make adjustments, and leave time to catch up on funerals, weddings, sacraments of initiation, and other postponed activities. We will also use the afternoons for Adoration and confessions and even offer a Wednesday evening Mass for June and July to provide an after-work option. Again, this is a short-term schedule until we get a better handle on things. Thank you for your patience and cooperation!

Summer Schedule Summary (June and July – tentatively):

EVENT	ST. JOHN	ST. THOMAS
Weekday Masses	9am – Mon, Wed, Fri	9am – Tues, Thurs, Sat 7pm – Wed
Sunday Masses	8am, 10am, Noon and 7pm	4:30pm – Sat., 9am and 11am
Adoration and Confessions	1-3pm on Tues and Thurs	4-6:30pm on Wed before Mass 12:30-3pm on Sun after Mass

HOURS OF OPERATION: For June and July, our parish office hours will continue to be 8am – 5pm, Monday through Friday. Our building open hours will be as follows:

St. John

Monday – Friday 8am - 5pm

Saturday Closed

**Except for weddings and Food Cupboard*

Sunday 7am - 8pm

St. Thomas

M, Tu, Th, F 8am - 5pm

Wednesday 8am - 8pm

Saturday 8am - 6pm

Sunday 8am - 5pm

(African & Korean Mass schedule – TBD)

Daily Devotions: Thank you to all who are participating in our 3:30pm Holy Spirit Novena in preparation for Pentecost! We have one more novena scheduled for June. Please join us as we pray for all those to be ordained to the priesthood and diaconate on Saturday, June 13, including our future associate, Dcn. Mike Cassar. We will begin this novena on June 4. Stay tuned to our new Facebook page for details: www.facebook.com/elcatholics.org/

FROM OUR FACILITIES GROUP BY PAUL LACROIX (placroix@elcatholics.org)

We are dedicated to making our churches as safe as possible during this pandemic. People living in the same household may sit together, but we ask everyone to be aware of and maintain social distancing as necessary. Please enter and exit Mass maintaining social distance and do not stop for conversation inside the building. The maintenance staff is very diligent about cleaning between each Mass and people should proceed directly out of the building following Mass. For a complete list of precautions for attending Mass, go to elcatholics.org/mass-times.

UNITING OUR HEARTS, MUSIC MINISTRY BY ALI DARLEY (adarley@elcatholics.org)

We are blessed in the St. Thomas/St. John parish to have a congregation that sings! For the safety of those at Mass, some changes are being put in place. Please keep in mind that these changes are temporary. This is not a new way of life here in the parish and I fully expect you all to sing again as soon as it is healthy!

As we've mentioned before, all hymnals have been placed in storage for the time being. The diocese has issued the following guidelines with regard to music:

There is to be no congregational singing. In addition, spoken responses should not be vigorously vocalized, but expressed in a soft voice. Singing and vigorous speech increases the risk of viral spread through the aerosolization of droplets, which are only filtered by N95-grade masks.

I understand that this will feel strange but I would rather be overly safe to keep our congregation healthy as we return to the public celebration of Mass. You will notice a few changes in the Gloria, Responsorial Psalm, and Alleluia. To keep us from responding out of habit, the refrains will only be sung at the beginning and end by the cantor. As encouraged by *Musicam Sacram* (15), "The faithful fulfil their liturgical role [through] full, conscious and active participation." In light of the current situation we will "unite [ourselves] interiorly to what the ministers sing, so that by listening to them [we] may raise [our] minds to God." Following the dismissal, we ask that you exit row by row from the back of church once the priests have exited. There will be no closing hymn to facilitate this process.

I look forward to when our full, conscious, and active participation includes your voices and those of our of choirs raised in song. In the meantime, know of our prayers for your continued health and safety!

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS BY PETE RIES (pries@elcatholics.org)

I have been in weekly contact with the RCIA community via a group email which combines recent updates on our parish situation as well as some reflection materials for ongoing faith formation. This year's group of catechumens and candidates will come into the Church at a closed Mass on Saturday, June 20. The January group of inquirers (a new group of people seeking to learn about the Catholic Church) was put on hold March 22. It will resume sometime in June. Finally, the May group of inquirers was postponed. That group will begin Sunday, June 28, at St. John Church and Student Center, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

If you or someone you know is interested in learning about the Catholic Church, have them contact Pete Ries at 517-351-5460, ext. 1328 or email him. Some of the people in this new group of inquirers have asked the parish to provide them with a sponsor. If you are willing to consider serving as an RCIA sponsor, please contact Pete Ries. Each of these RCIA gatherings will incorporate precautions of social distancing and the use of face masks.

ADULT FAITH FORMATION BY AL WEILBAECHER (al@elcatholics.org)

Retirement In April I asked Fr. Gordon's blessing on my decision to retire from full-time ministry this coming summer, beginning August 1. In many ways, it was a difficult decision as I have truly enjoyed and been blessed ministering with so many wonderful parishioners and staff over these 43 years of ministry. But as I have discerned and prayed about it, I feel very much at peace with this decision while not knowing exactly

what the future holds. This will still be my home parish and I do trust that the same Holy Spirit, who guided me to ministry in mid- Michigan, will also guide me in future ministry discernment as a parishioner and volunteer!

Small Groups Last fall marked our third year of forming and training parishioners to be leaders for small faith-sharing groups in our parish. Over the past three years we have trained almost 30 parishioners to be small group leaders. We had a strong and wonderful launch for our small groups this Lent with 20-plus faith-sharing groups and close to a total of 200 participating. Then COVID-19 hit mid-Lent. Several groups have continued to meet virtually through Zoom or GoogleMeet, as we all have struggled and adapted to use technology to continue on. This summer (and fall) we are encouraging and resourcing leaders and their small groups to continue meeting or connecting with one another in some fashion to continue praying, sharing and reflecting on the Sunday Scripture readings. If you are not part of a small faith-sharing group and would like to join one, please contact me!

Adult Faith Formation Approximately every other week, we send out an email entitled “Opportunities to Continue Growing in Your Catholic Faith and Spirituality” to over 600 recipients. This includes events, highlights, and links for many of our parish offerings to nurture your own faith formation. If you would like to be included, please send me your email address. (If you do not have email, please give me your address and I will mail you a copy of it each time.) I am also happy to mail or email the monthly issue of “*Bringing Home the Word*” (reflections on the Sunday readings for each month), and our parish’s monthly prayer intentions.

In other news, with various safety protocols in place, baptisms will resume in early June and our adult candidates for Confirmation will celebrate Confirmation with our high school teens. Finally, in mid-June we will be offering a discussion through GoogleMeet on “Lectio: Prayer,” a six session series available through FORMED.org. Discussions will take place on Wednesday evenings, at 7:00 pm, June 17 through July 22. If you are interested in participating, please let me know!

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION BY DEBBIE LEWIS (dlewis@elcatholics.org)

Summer options for Religious Education are numerous. A few of the really good websites are www.teachingcatholickids.com (Family Faith on the Go!) and www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/family/catholic-kids. They are loaded with fun things to do and make. I can also send you our Children's Bulletins that we usually print off for Sunday Mass as an email. Just contact me dlewis@elcatholics.org or call (517)332-0064.

Regular Mass attendance is the best way you can show your children your faith is important. Watching Mass at home together is an option if you are worried about being in the building with others right now. The Bishop has dispensed with the obligation to attend in person until Labor Day. When the church buildings are open feel free to spend time with Him to refresh your soul. We also have stations outside on the backside of the St. Thomas Aquinas and a beautiful Marian garden where you can drop off flowers any time you want while asking our Blessed Mother to help with your problems or to just say "Thank You!" I will be updating the website in July with the class times and forms for August registrations. We will start October 4-5.

Please, prayerfully consider being a catechist/religion teacher in the fall as we will need them. This can be a wonderful way to model for your children how important the faith journey is!

First Communions will be spread out starting in June and going through September at most Sunday Masses at both churches. We will try to gather together once before your month of First Communion to practice on how to receive properly. I will email a date and time for those. Make sure your family is taking advantage of confession times as we all need to use this sacrament often.

CAMPUS MINISTRY by KATIE DILLER GLEASON AND TAYLOR PIOTRZKOWSKI

(kgleason@elcatholics.org, taylorp@elcatholics.org)

As our campus ministry waits to discover how MSU will respond to the new reality of Covid-19 (possibly with a revised schedule for fall) we are continuing to foster community and leadership formation for students who have left campus prematurely!

Zooming for Community Students tend to struggle while at home over the summer apart from the St. John's community. To fight isolation and stagnation, we've launched several online small groups, and also a weekly theology discussion using online videos. Every Wednesday night students join to seek intimate community and to wrestle with their questions about faith and theology with our campus ministry staff over Zoom. Taylor has also continued one-on-one discipleship training with students who are hungry to grow in faith and leadership skills!

Planning for Fall Calling all Green Thumbed Parishioners! Our Freshman Plant Project has been a great success- entering it's eleventh year!!! How does it work? Parishioners spend the summer nurturing plants that are easy to propagate- like baby spider plants or little aloes. In August, you plant your babies at home in 4" pots that you can pick up at St. John.

Bring them back just before the semester starts (due Aug 23-30). We need to order pots, please email Katie Diller Gleason with the number of plants that you can provide. Some parishioners have contributed two or three, others have brought in over a hundred!

During Welcome Week, we give these free plants to Freshmen as a way of reminding them to "Grow in their Faith!" Our plants are extremely popular, and a great icebreaker for our leaders to use to invite new students into conversation and perhaps a visit to St. John Student Center.

And personally, Taylor and Katie have spent some of these strange times adapting to some major life events! Taylor married his bride Valentina in a small but Spirit-filled Mass in the Cana Chapel at St. Thomas Aquinas. Katie and her husband are in the last days of preparing for the birth of their first child. Please keep their growing families in prayer!

PARISH SCHOOL BY PRINCIPAL MEGHAN LOUGHLIN-KRUSKY (mkrusky@elcatholics.org)

As the calendar flips from May to June our St. Thomas Aquinas Parish School Tartans are ending their academic year, like we never have before. Our parish school was blessed to transition to eLearning on Monday, March 16th without a break in education for our students. We have successfully completed 10 weeks of virtual learning and are so proud of the way our students, families, and faculty handled this great challenge. Over the past 10 weeks, our students have found success through teacher led recordings of assignments, online meetings with their teachers and friends, and academic support through student centered, family virtual meetings or calls. The partnership that St. Thomas Aquinas Parish School has created

with our families during this time has allowed each of our students to continue to grow spiritually, academically, socially, and emotionally during these trying times.

We are also finding creative ways to celebrate the milestones of many of our Tartans! Our 8th graders will be honored with a safe and different graduation this year but an honor that needs to happen after their years of hard work. Additionally, we will celebrate our students and staff members with a final drive-by parade to celebrate the major accomplishments each Tartan has had over the past year. Although we are excited to celebrate the major accomplishments of this year, we are already looking to welcome back our Tartans on August 18th.

Planning is already underway for how the education of our Tartans will look next year. We are gathering information from across the United States and are patiently waiting for the release of the Michigan guidelines to finalize our plans. Although the safety guidelines are still a work in progress, the academic rigor and spiritual support we offer our students will not change. Just as we took on the challenge of eLearning this year, we look forward to refining our skills over the summer to come back better than before. We will continue to streamline the tools we are using to help support our families, as well as continue to differentiate our instruction to meet the needs of our students in person or virtually. Further, as we continue to plan for next year, we are excited about the opportunity to welcome new families and Tartans to our growing school community! If your family is looking for *more*, spiritually and academically during the next school year, we encourage you to reach out to our parish school principal, Mrs. Meghan Loughlin-Krusky for additional information.

YOUR COMMUNITY RESURGENT BY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, JOSHUA GINEPRO
(jginepro@elcatholics.org)

In the days and weeks following the initial outbreak and the subsequent Shelter in Place orders, there was an air of trepidation, uncertainty, and fear over what the future would hold for everyone. There was certainly much to be worried about as pertains to the financial health of our beloved parish and to keep one up night after night. In just 3 weeks during March, our offertory deficit spiked by 25% with the closing of the church doors for public safety. We were faced with the hard decision to furlough or lay off some of our staff. Reeling from cancelations and a radical paradigm shift moving ministry online, the absence of a number of our friends and colleagues was conspicuous.

Before we knew it, April was upon us. With a Holy Week unlike any other, there was a worry that we would be unable to even connect with much of our community. Thankfully between the Outreach Mass and our live streamed Masses and services, we reached thousands of people! In what may be called a minor miracle our Easter offertory actually exceeded what had been budgeted for too! At the beginning of May, we were even able to bring back some of our staff.

In the months that have followed the initial closure, we have seen this community continue to come together in a spirit of generosity amidst the radical difficulties - physical, spiritual, emotional, and financial - that many of us are facing at this time. You came together to sew masks, to feed the hungry, to reach out to the lonely, to support new ways of engaging in ministry, to pray devotions, and to celebrate Mass from afar. You have even given of your financial means, when many are hurting and find themselves out of work. Every time I see a 'stimulus check tithe' come across my desk my heart swells with love and pride for this community. Thank

you for continuing to allow us to serve you through thick and thin!

Collection boxes will be in the gathering spaces at the back of each church for offertory when we return. We will not be passing baskets to minimize contact. If you do not feel comfortable returning yet or would like to make a “hands free” offering, try our safe and secure online giving portal at www.ELCatholics.org/giving



Scan to Give

CLERGY UPDATE

In short, we miss you all very much! As we pray the Holy Spirit Novena, we are praying for Pentecost to be a true celebration of the rebirth of the Church and the re-opening of public worship. Given the many precautions taken at Mass, please don't be offended if we don't greet you before or after Mass. To keep healthy for the sake of the many, we will likely be limiting our contact in the coming weeks. That said, if the infection rate continues to decline, we hope to have various get-togethers over the summer to celebrate Dcn. Mike's ordination, Fr. Gary's new assignment as pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Howell, Al Weilbaeher's retirement, etc. There will also be special liturgies to celebrate our Confirmations and RCIA Initiations in June; however, these will be invitation only events under the circumstances. We're working on ways to celebrate and stay safe at the same time. More to come....

In conclusion...

As we conclude our 50-day celebration of Easter, we are reminded of our identity as disciples of Jesus, the Risen Lord! Pentecost is the celebration of the birth of the Church; this year we can celebrate it as our rebirth to mission. Thank you for your patience and faithfulness, generosity and prayerfulness! Without your support, we wouldn't be able to re-open our doors. Let's rise again with Christ and come together this summer to pray for the world around us.

Thank you, stay tuned for more, and God bless you!



Prayer During Coronavirus Pandemic

O clement, O loving, O sweet Mother Mary,
We, your children of every nation,
Turn to you in this pandemic.
Our troubles are numerous; our fears are great.
Grant that we might deposit them at your feet,
Take refuge in your Immaculate Heart,
And obtain peace, healing, rescue,
And timely help in all our needs.
You are our Mother. Pray for us to your Son.
Amen.

May the God of hope
fill you with all joy and peace as you
trust in him, so that you may
overflow with hope by the power of
the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

**St. Thomas Aquinas
St. John Church & Student Center
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If you need to update your information with us, please go to elcatholics.org/parishioner-update-form

The Church Is Re-Opening!

Inside is a letter from Fr. Gordon and news of all our ministries!

Precautions we've taken:

- Hand sanitizer will be available all over church
- Holy Water fonts and Hymnals were removed
- Offertory baskets have been removed – boxes are available in the back of the church. You can drop in your offering or go online to elcatholics.org/giving to donate.
- Every other pew is roped off - please leave these ropes in place
- The floor is marked to keep 6 ft. distance between communicants
- Anyone distributing Holy Communion (including priests) will be required to wear face masks while distributing Communion and use hand-sanitizer if one's hands become compromised during Communion distribution
- Distribution of the Precious Blood has been discontinued
- Parish staff will monitor the doors to make sure 25% capacity is not reached
- Sign of peace will be given from the altar, but not between parishioners
- Restroom use is discouraged. (Social Distancing is not possible in our restrooms)

Expectations of parishioners:

- Those that are ill or vulnerable will not attend
- Parents are encouraged to leave small children at home, if feasible
- 6 ft social distancing will be kept at all times for people from different households
- Everyone attending will wear a mask throughout Mass - only taking it down to receive Communion - and please bring your own hand-sanitizer to use before Communion
- Congregational singing temporarily discontinued
- Hands will not be held during the Our Father between people from different households
- All are strongly encouraged to receive Holy Communion in the hand
- Avoid gathering inside the church before or after Mass
- Parishioners are asked to leave the church starting with the back row so that crowding doesn't happen
- Please follow all door signs and instructions given during before, during and after Mass