

Dear People of St. Paul Parish,

Bishop Spalding has issued his latest decree concerning the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation. This decree extends the dispensation from that obligation once again. Different this time is that the dispensation is extended indefinitely. Bishop Spalding wrote that this likely will be the case through the rest of the calendar year. As before, the Bishop encourages people who are sick, vulnerable, or anxious about being infected with Covid-19 to stay at home. Those who do attend a public Mass should be in good health, observe social distancing, and wear a face mask/covering.

At St. Paul Parish I have chosen to not offer Sunday Mass as long as the dispensation is in effect. Instead, to further the requirement of social distancing at prayer, we have Mass each day, Monday through Friday. Following the Bishop's suggestion, we have a Mass in English at 6:00 PM on Wednesday. We will offer Mass at 8 AM on the First Saturday of each month, and in August there will be a Mass for the Solemnity of the Assumption on Saturday, August 15th.

The difference between Sunday Mass and Weekday Mass is the number of persons attending. I have found that the Daily Masses in a church building with a 500-seat capacity can be successful in maintaining social distancing without extreme supervision. The hope has been that offering Masses throughout the week will enable most people in the parish to attend as they would on Sunday but spread out in smaller groups daily. No one enjoys this disruption of life-long habits on how to keep Holy the Lord's Day, but prayer is still possible and easily accessible. Many have found Masses on television or through the Internet very helpful in their prayer.

These measures are being done to insure the health of parish members and out of concern for the larger community. This is fundamentally a matter of a Respect for Life and respect for the health of others. They will remain in place until something changes. Unfortunately, the number of infections of Covid-19 in Coffee County and Tennessee are increasing at an alarming rate. I appreciate your support of this program as Bishop Spalding has defined social distancing.

The good news is that the State of Tennessee has not shut down again as in March when we had no public Masses. We can continue to hold public Masses, and we can gather socially in groups not more than 50 people for now. We will await further directions from Bishop Spalding if there are any changes.

Religious Education classes share the same dilemmas as the schools in our area. St. Paul Parish has been successful in moving toward the celebrations of First Communion and Confirmation of the 2019-2020 school year. Our Faith Formation program will begin with the start of the Sacramental Grades, Second and Seventh-Eighth, shortly after Labor Day. We expect this sacramental preparation to be done through in-person classes weekly. Right now, we are considering having each of the other Grades meet with their teacher for an in-person once a month. The majority of their school year will be done by their parents or guardians with materials provided by the Director of Religious Education. Registration for all Faith Formation Classes has already begun. Look at the parish website or come by the Parish Office for a student registration form.

I thank you for your patience as well as your support in prayer and by other contributions for the welfare of St. Paul the Apostle Parish. May God protect us from all harm.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Stephen A. Klasek, Pastor
July 31, 2020