



HOLY ROSARY PARISH

4139 42nd Avenue Southwest
Seattle, Washington 98116

March 11, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

For some time now we have all followed the news of the coronavirus outbreak, its spread throughout the world, its arrival here in the Seattle area and the devastation it leaves in its wake, especially in China and Italy. While we are all used to the regular flu, and have built up some immunities and vaccinations, this is a new virus with a higher fatality rate. The World Health Organization has now classified it as a pandemic, and the three primary goals for us as a community are to limit its spread locally, reduce the peak number of those affected, and preserve the limited capacity of our health care system.

Unfortunately, despite initial efforts of precaution and containment, it is no longer a question of *if* the coronavirus will affect our local parish community. Yesterday I met with a man whose mother was at the Life Care Center in Kirkland, and thankfully has tested negative for the coronavirus and is no longer there, but there has been and is still much anxiety. And earlier today I learned from one of our school families that a grandparent was diagnosed with the coronavirus.

As Christians, therefore, it is our goal not just to respond as the authorities and public health officials direct and recommend, but also with prudence, and always as disciples of Christ.

For the last two weeks, we have taken some steps already with regard to some of our parish activities and in our celebration of the Mass. But in response to Governor Inslee's [official order](#) earlier today banning all public gatherings over 250 people until the end of March, possibly longer, Archbishop Etienne has made the extraordinary decision to cancel all Masses throughout the Archdiocese of Seattle. He has posted a [video](#) online explaining this decision and the urgency. It is an extraordinary step to take to deal with an extraordinary situation.

The last week has also seen several local schools and school districts decide to close, as well, to protect their staff, many of which are in the at risk category, as well as to help limit the spread. Earlier today, with the closure of Seattle Public Schools for the next two weeks, the Archdiocese of Seattle has confirmed that parish schools in places where the district closes will close as well. As such, effective immediately, Holy Rosary School will be switching to at-home and online learning for at least two weeks. Our teachers have been preparing for this for over a week now, and will make final preparations in the days ahead to begin this new format on Monday. Earlier this week, our event location also cancelled our school auction, which was supposed to be held this Saturday, March 14th. As our primary annual school fundraiser, we have thankfully been able to reschedule it for May 9th.

In addition to Governor Inslee's order, the King County Public Health Officer has issued a [local order](#) which severely limits gatherings of less than 250 people in King County, unless very strict precautions are in place, including social distancing which requires people to limit contact within six feet of others to less than ten minutes. Given the reality of these requirements and in the spirit of slowing the spread of the coronavirus, all parish liturgies, gatherings and events are cancelled effective today. This includes, but is not limited to, Sunday and daily Mass, Confessions, Stations of the Cross, faith formation, sacramental preparation, spirituality groups, CYO practices and games, and dance classes.

The Governor was clear that he wants business to continue as much as usual as much as possible. And this is our goal as well. In one of the prayers occasionally used at Mass, we call to mind that "life is changed, not ended."

So what do some of those changes look like?

The parish staff and our volunteers will continue to serve our community as best as we can in this temporary reality. At present, most of our parish staff are still in the offices.

Our primary task as a Church is the worship of God – union with our Lord Jesus Christ on the way to Heaven. This Sunday I will still be celebrating Mass, and it is our intention to make it available online – perhaps even livestreamed, for you to participate in. While all individuals are exempted from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass at this time, it is still important to keep the Lord's Day as much as possible. While Mass on TV or online doesn't fulfill the Sunday obligation, it is better than nothing and connects us to the central mystery of our faith. I can tell you now that the prospect of not being with you on Sunday saddens me.

Our second task as a Church is to grow as disciples of Christ. While our onsite faith formation is temporarily closing, thankfully in the modern age there are incredible resources online. This year the parish purchased a FORMED subscription which hopefully you have already started to take advantage of, but if not, now is a perfect opportunity. There are books, movies, podcasts, bible studies and videos to explore our wonderful and beautiful faith and the life of the Church. Our faith formation staff will start creating online content as well as resources for individuals to look for greater ways to deepen our faith today – a perennial invitation.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandments were, He responded that we were to love God above all else, and our neighbor before ourselves. Just because there is a pandemic does not mean that we stop loving one another. In fact, the witness of the Church during such times has always been one of greater activity and service to those in need in particular.

For several weeks now, our public health officials have identified those who are most at risk as being:

- Those over 60 years old;
- Those who have underlying medical conditions; and
- Those who are pregnant.

These individuals, for their own sake, have been invited to self-limit their exposure risk by self-limiting their public contact. Today Archbishop Etienne, Governor Inslee and others all once again encouraged these individuals to listen the advice of our medical and scientific professionals.

It is also always incumbent on the rest of us to do what we can to serve those in need. We have already started creating a phone tree, and it will be important to reach out to those who are self-limiting their public exposure, who might feel alone, isolated, or even anxious. If you know someone in this case, give them a call. Keep the bonds of communion intact. Consider praying with them on the phone as well. But also see if there is anything that they need? Do they need groceries or other personal items, and do not feel comfortable going to the grocery store? We can help with that! And not only can we – but we must help with that! Jesus couldn't carry His cross alone, and we cant either. It is incumbent on us to be Simon the Cyrenian as we help shoulder the weight, to be Veronica as we wipe away the blood and sweat and tears, to be the Women of Jerusalem who simply wept with Christ, or Mary who was there throughout.

If you yourself are self-limiting your contact, and wish to be added to our call list, please email Libby at parishoffice@holyrosaryseattle.org. While it is best to simply reach out to those you know, if you would like to assist with phone contact, or running errands, for those parishioners who are in nursing homes who are now mostly closed to outside visitors, or those at-risk who are self-limiting, please contact Libby as well.

During times such as this, our public services are called upon even more to serve the homeless population which is at great risk. We have several ministries that serve the homeless and hungry, and we are currently working on ways to see what is possible under the current restrictions. Our parishioners have always been dedicated to serving the poorest and those in need – and that cant stop now. We need to figure out what that looks like in this environment with the restrictions in place.

Last week I assured all our parish and school staff that whether we continue to operate from the school or parish offices, or from home, in a full or even with a limited capacity, they would continue to receive their full regular pay and benefits. Thank you to those who already give online whose contributions will support our work and ministry during this difficult time. If you do not currently give online but wish to do so for the present time, either with one-time donations or to establish ongoing giving, you can do so at www.osvonlinegiving.com/4255. For now we are also able to receive mail and you can use the business envelope included in your monthly envelope packets, as well. This past weekend, with many self-limiting their public exposure, we saw a 20-50% drop in Mass attendance depending on the Mass time, and a 30% drop in our Mass collections. Thank you to those who continue to support our work and ministry which doesn't end – but only changes.

More information will be coming out in the days and weeks ahead. Thank you for your patience, and for the tangible ways in which the love of God will be manifest through us. Thank you for responding to the orders and recommendations of our health and public officials to respond with precaution and prudence, and not fear and anxiety. And thank you for responding as well to the deeper call of our Lord Jesus Christ to love.

We are always called to be brother and sister to one another. Those who are healthy should continue on as much as able, which our public and health officials have encouraged as well, as we support those in need, members of our local community, and businesses. It is also important that we support those who have been victims of the stigma of the coronavirus, who face discrimination because of their race. The coronavirus disregards the color of one's skin. So too must our love.

Let us keep in our prayers the victims of the coronavirus, those who have died, and those presently ill. Let us also pray for their families and caretakers, and all who are helping guide us through this difficult time. May the Holy Spirit fill us not only with the wisdom of God, but His peace as well.

More information will be coming out in the days ahead, and will be posted on the website and sent out through an eblast as well as on our other online platforms. Parish ministry leaders are asked to share the above information with those they serve. If you need something, or would like to help, let us know.

Below is the prayer that calls upon the intercession of Our Lady of Seattle. Let us remain united together in love and prayer, as we long for the day when we gather together again in the House of God.

In Christ,
Fr. Matthew Oakland
froakland@holyroaryseattle.org



Holy Mary, we come before you as spiritual children in great need, seeking your intercession, and asking that your mantle of love surround us to console, protect, and lead us to your son Jesus.

We entrust all of God's family, especially the church in Western Washington, into your immaculate hands. With your son Jesus' gentle power you can *undo any knot* in our church, and in the lives of believers who entrust themselves to your care.

Today I especially entrust to you [*mention request/ Coronavirus here*], and I ask that — through your intercession, and that of St. James, our guardian angels, and the faithful in our archdiocese — we may be free from every spiritual and temporal ill, and be safely led to encounter your son's merciful, sacred heart.

Our Lady of Seattle, Undoer of Knots, pray for us!

