

May 14, 2000: Building Community in the Wake of COVID-19

The Office of Worship has instituted a weekly video conference for pastors, parish life coordinators and deacons working in the archdiocese about how to navigate the reopening of churches. Yesterday's conference raised some interesting points that recognize that these extraordinary times, as fraught with danger as they are, also contain opportunities for deepening our bonds as a community. A good deal of discussion has revolved around the fact that the churches will only hold 20% to 30% of their normal capacity. What to do about addressing that reality?

One of the perspectives I really appreciated was the thought that we could use this occasion to think not only of ourselves but also of those who will not be able to attend Sunday Mass. If we keep that in mind as we discern what our participation in the parish's liturgical life will be we might find ourselves being called to make some adjustments to our plan. For example, Fr. Pat Beidelman, who heads the Office of Worship, suggested that those of us who can attend might take it upon ourselves to pick a prayer partner—someone we know who can't attend—and commit to praying for them during this time of their imposed absence from the eucharistic table.

Here are my notes about his proposal: *Since some will be able to attend Mass before others we would like to try to avoid a situation of "haves" and "have nots." This is an opportunity to develop a ministry of solidarity and accompaniment. Perhaps those who can come back first could offer their communion for someone who has to stay home. Ask God to send the graces to them. This creates a mindfulness of the communion we are called to with one another. Actively praying for the good of another who is sharing in the cross by needing to stay at home could become a ministry of the entire community. By linking people up with one another we help to take the edge off the sorrow of not being able to attend and move away from isolation and thinking simply about our own needs.*

What I like most about this is that it provides a concrete example of how we as a community can make good use of the current circumstances to move forward together on the journey of faith. That's always part of the Christian calling and here we have an example of how it can be done in the right here and now.