

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

While our current situation is not without historical precedent, we find ourselves in a very unusual and quickly changing environment. The COVID-19 virus is already impacting our daily lives in ways unsuspected just days ago. This is requiring all of us to adjust our normal decisions and routines; sometimes in ways that push us beyond what is usual and comfortable. Within community life, such as a parish, decisions that impact all of us are difficult to make with a fluid situation that seems to change by the hour. Below, I am going to outline several areas of parish life that will be modified effective immediately until further notice.

The following items will be addressed:

1. Future Planning
2. Which programs and activities are suspended or canceled
3. School operations
4. Sacramental, Liturgical and devotional programs
5. Daily and Weekend Masses

### **One: Future Planning**

Long term parish planning for upcoming events and activities will continue to be planned and prepared. We will operate with final decisions made about cancelation, modifications, or rescheduling on an approximate one week rolling review of upcoming events.

### **Two: Programs and Activities**

Per the Archbishop of Indianapolis, Charles Thompson, the following parish events are canceled (if done in groups) until further notice:

- Religious Education
- Sacramental Preparation
- RCIA
- Youth and Young Adult Ministries
- Council and committee meetings (unless deemed essential by the pastor)
- Social gatherings
- Fundraisers
- Special events
- Funeral luncheon meals
- Facility rentals (exceptions deemed essential by the pastor)
- Any other event except sacramental or devotional

The Archbishop specifically permitted Fish Fry's if there is a carry out or drive through option without a dine in option.

### **Three: School Operations**

Per the Office of Catholic Education, determination of school operations are to be made at the local level as the Archdiocese is spread over 38 counties. St. Nicholas School has been in close contact with the local county Health Department and other area schools. We are closing for spring break one day early and have plans for long term eLearning days if we remain closed after spring break. A determination regarding in building or remote learning will be made closer to the end of spring break and will be communicated to all parents in a timely manner.

### **Four: Sacramental, Liturgical and Devotional Life**

Modifications regarding sacramental and devotional life are as follows:

- 1) Masses, confessions, and other devotions will continue as scheduled per the request of the Archbishop unless modified based on changing circumstance.
- 2) Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will continue at St. Nicholas, but adoration will take place in the main body of the Church rather than in the chapel to accommodate more people while maintaining “social distancing.” During daily mass Adoration will continue in the chapel but there should only be people of the same household in the chapel at one time.

### **Five: Sunday Mass**

Regarding Sunday Masses we are balancing two directives. The first and most important is the mandate of the Archbishop to continue Masses as scheduled. I fully support this. The second is the mandate of the Governor of the State of Indiana limiting gatherings of people to less than 250 in one place at one time. I also, fully support this because “social distancing” is a proven method to slow the spread of the virus. **Daily mass and confessions will continue to take place in church as scheduled.** However, there will be some changes to Sunday mass.

**Drawing on historical practice during times of pandemic, Mass will be celebrated outside Saturday evening and Sunday morning.** Households should drive together and remain in or near their vehicles. We are currently working on technological options that will permit the audio of the mass to be transmitted throughout the parking lot area. Even with such short notice, we hope to have this in place for this weekend. Because of the technological challenges, there will not be music this weekend but hope to have that restored very soon. Those receiving Holy Communion will be asked to stand outside of their cars or to signal the communion minister to come to them if they cannot stand outside of the car. More details are being worked out, but I would ask you to pick up the instruction sheet from the parking lot attendants and to follow their instructions when you arrive for Mass this weekend.

The Archbishop has granted a dispensation to all the faithful in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis relieving them of the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation effective immediately until further notice. My desire is for most people not to use this dispensation since we are having Mass outside and people can maintain a level of isolation.

Having said that, I would **strongly** encourage those who are at high risk (over the age of 70, pre-existing respiratory conditions or cardiac conditions, or those with compromised immune systems) to use this dispensation to remain self-isolated from **all** crowds and public spaces.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This is a very fluid situation and things seem to be changing literally hour by hour some days. Please be patient with the process as we, together, deal with circumstance that we have never been faced in recent memory. Things like this have happened before and people can be at their best or be at their worst. We as the faithful of St Nicholas and St Anthony need to be at our best to serve and care for each other and our community.

Finally, as sickness and mortality are seen more clearly in these days, I ask you above all to pray, sacrifice, go to confession, visit our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and to do works of charity. Being disciples of the Lord Jesus today will lead to us being Saints in the live to come! I remain-

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Shaun Whittington