

Dear Parishioners,

I pray and hope that you are all doing well and staying warm and healthy during these challenging times. With the surge in COVID-19 cases in Northern Minnesota, I can imagine that the nerves of many are again being put on edge. My encouragement is to remain confident in the Lord Jesus! He is our hope, our strength and our peace, especially during such uncertain and difficult times. Jesus is our all, our everything! Only when people live that reality do they find the peace that their hearts are aching for.

Just an email to update you on two matters. First, with the surge of positive cases in our area, the Governor of Minnesota has placed new restrictions on certain institutions such as bars and restaurants, as well as certain social gatherings, such as wedding and funeral receptions. It is important to note that these new restrictions *do not impact places of worship in regards to gatherings for faith-based events*. The state restrictions remain the same for churches, as do our diocesan protocols. In other words, we will continue to carry out the protocols that we have already been observing of wearing masks at church, maintaining social distancing and making use of hand sanitizer as necessary.

Specifically, in its news report of the Governor's press conference this past Tuesday, WDIO Duluth reported as follows: "[Governor] Walz said that there will be no change to rules for religious services because the data has not shown a connection between religious services and the recent increase in outbreaks. He said that the problems are not associated with the weddings and funerals themselves, but with the gatherings that follow."

Brothers and sisters, I was very encouraged by this news! And I am very proud of all of you! Due to your willingness to comply with current COVID protocols at church, and due to the love and care that you have for one another, we have effectively demonstrated that attending Church and celebrating Mass and other sacraments can be done in a way that is safe and that is not disproportionately risky compared to other public outings. Thank you, brothers and sisters, thank you for your willingness to continue to comply and observe the diocesan protocols for attendance at Mass, even and especially when doing so has perhaps become tiresome. Your kind obedience has borne real spiritual fruit! I humbly ask you to please continue to observe the diocesan protocols at Mass and church events. Thank you so much!

Secondly, just another plug for the need for each parish to meet our United Catholic Appeal goal. We remain short of our annual goal for UCA, which is due by the end of this year. Please remember, everyone, that UCA funds directly impact our diocese' ability to carry out ministry in our neck of the woods. Just like our parish, the diocese has no real way of acquiring the funds that it needs to operate other than from the generosity of the Body of Christ. It's also important to remember that as Catholics in Northern Minnesota, our number one priority is to support our bishop (once we receive one) in his ministry to us as our shepherd. UCA monies make that ministry possible. From paying the salaries of the diocesan staff at the pastoral center, to funding the work of the marriage tribunal, to funding the work of the marriage and family life office, youth events such as Camp Survive and confirmation retreats, the annual

Men's and Women's conference, social outreach, catechesis, and on and on- UCA makes the diocese' work on our behalf possible, and the Bishop's ministry as Successor of the Apostles and Shepherd of our diocese is of the greatest importance, since every diocesan priest exercises his ministry as pastor of parishes on behalf of and in union with the ministry of the Bishop.

So please, if you have not yet given toward your United Catholic Appeal parish goal, or if you are able to give over and above what you may have already given, please do so. You can mail in donations to your parish, put them in the collection basket (provided that they are clearly marked "UCA") or drop them off at the parish office. To help with meeting our goal, I am going to start putting in the weekly bulletin how much each parish has left to raise to meet their goal.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me. May God bless you and your family with good health and peace!

Fr. Steve Laflamme