



**ST JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH**  
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Dear Parishioners,

On this Memorial Day weekend, I am filled with memories of people with whom I served in the military, the many legal and illegal Masses I celebrated out in the field in different countries, the fatal mishap that we experienced aboard ship, and the first Kako call I made to inform a spouse that her husband had died serving his country, the military funerals and funerals with military honors that I celebrated, the death of the brother of one of my godsons and how his family wanted me to celebrate the funeral of this hero. This weekend is a time to remember those who have given their lives in the service of our country. We must remember those of our neighboring countries who gave their life for their country and to further the protections of their allies including the United States.

On June 8, I will celebrate 35 years as an ordained priest for the Diocese of Austin along with 6 of my fellow priests who were both the largest class and the last class ordained by Bishop Vincent Harris. During these years, I have served as Associate Pastor in only 2 parishes, Pastor in countless others, Teacher in the Adult Formation program of the Diocese, Teacher in the Diaconate Program for the Diocese, Teacher in Catholic schools, including St Mary's and Reicher in Waco, Campus Minister at the Baylor Catholic Student Center, Dean of the Western Deanery, Educational Consultant for the Deacon Training Program when it was just getting started in its new format, Prison and Jail Minister, Military Chaplain, and a host of other ministries. I never would have dreamed that I would end my public career in the same deanery that I started so many years ago. This assignment should be my last assignment until retirement and how interesting it has been so far, especially now that we are living in this pandemic. It gives a new meaning to the experience of what it means to be the body of Christ in support of one another while remaining independent and under gradually loosening protocols to bring our country back to its normal state. I never would have dreamed that the bishop would declare no public Masses in the diocese and most dioceses across the United States would do the same.

In relation to the Pandemic and updates, this morning President Trump declared Religion and Houses of Worship essential and called for the governors of each state to open up the churches. This was good news even though governor Abbot had already begun opening up the churches in the state of Texas. While we have 6 cases of confirmed Corona Virus and are still under the 25% capacity limits, I would remind people of the following points for worship:

- Please use the hand sanitizer placed at the entrance of the churches as you arrive even if you have recently washed your hands. This confirms the fears of anyone who is watching you.
- The new protocols have us to refrain from bringing up the gifts at offertory time so that the fewest amount of people are handling the gifts.
- There is NO procession of the Cross at the present time, either at the beginning or end nor at offertory time for the gifts since they will not be brought up.

- Music sheets will continue to be prepared and, with the exception of the gospel acclamation, the common parts of the Mass will be spoken instead of sung. This goes along with the recent CDC findings regarding singing and particles remaining in the air.
- We will continue sitting people by households in every other pew for the time being. This allows for social distancing even though it actually puts us at 50% rather than 25% requirement.

We will continue the following policies for the time being:

- Both St Joseph and Sacred Heart should be open from 5:00 – 7:00 PM each day for private reflection and prayer with no more than 10 people, observing social distancing, at the same time.
- Eucharistic Ministers may distribute communion, taking precautions of masks, gloves, etc. to keep parishioners safe. St Joseph will maintain abundant supplies of consecrated hosts.
- I will continue to celebrate private Masses and will replenish consecrated hosts as necessary. These will be available for restock at St Joseph tabernacle. Eucharistic Ministers from Sacred Heart are welcome to bring Ciborium to refill their stocks from St. Joseph. Please contact the secretary for times outside the 5:00 – 7:00 PM openings for restocking purposes.
- I will continue to hear confessions at the rectory office in Marlin from 5 – 7 PM on Mondays on the following dates: June 1, June 15, and June 29. Everyone should go to confession at a minimum of once every 3 months, and better once a month if possible.
- As I am in a high-risk group due to age, Diabetes, Asthmatic tendencies, and respiratory issues, I am doing a great deal of social isolation as well as self-quarantine. But I will continue to respond to Anointing of the Sick requests while honoring hospital and nursing home rules. Please contact the office only after checking with hospital and nursing home staff concerning regulations during this pandemic.

I ask that you continue to pray for those people who lost their lives in sacrifice in the armed forces the entire week of the Memorial Day weekend as well as for those Veterans who had died even after they got out of the active duty military. They deserve our respect and thanks for the sacrifices that they and their families endured. I ask that you remember my fellow priests and myself who were ordained on June 8, 1985, this being our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination. Not one of my classmates nor I have left active duty ministry nor are any of us on the list of priests that had credible accusations of abuse. Please pray a special prayer for all of us innocent priests who still feel the stigma of those who betrayed their vows. No matter what people believe, all of us are still viewed with the stigma of others who gave into their weakness and caused great harm to the church. Finally, please continue to pray that in the near future, the danger of the pandemic will pass but also that we may never give up our Constitutional freedoms of this great country for which many of our fallen heroes gave their lives so that we might live in freedom. Please pray that governors, in enacting protocols, may realize that these freedoms were given by God, not by governments as recognized in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Only when we live in these freedoms and fight for them even in the midst of national and international crises, will they be the hope for all peoples. God bless each and every one of you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Fraternally in Christ,  
*Fr Greg McLaughlin, Pastor*