

Catholic priest blesses, encourages Chattanooga's faithful at their homes during coronavirus pandemic

Ranker

In an effort to encourage Chattanooga's faithful through the ongoing [global pandemic](#) and its economic fallout, the Very Rev. J. David Carter of the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul visited people at their homes on Wednesday.

Just as the priest did on Monday. And the week before. And just as he plans to do next week.

For nearly three hours on Wednesday morning, the priest traveled from house to house. At each stop, Carter, Sister Imelda Quechol, Fr. Colin Blatchford and Fr. Valentin Iurochkin set up a cross and monstrance, the elaborate sunburst-like vessel that holds the Holy Eucharist during Mass. The clergy, kneeling in the street or on sidewalks, prayed with each family and blessed them.

For many, this was their first in-person interaction with the church since [the Basilica held its last service on March 19, when the church shut down over concerns about spreading the coronavirus](#).

"It sort of made sense to bring Jesus to people, since people can't come to Jesus now," Carter said.

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Photo Gallery

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Carter began visiting homes last week, starting with English-speaking congregants. He would call ahead, then sit outside with the people to hear confessions and pray. When the church decided to do the same among the Spanish-speaking members, Quechol quickly mobilized the community into the machine-like procession carried out on Wednesday, just days before the holiest moments in the Christian calendar.

Visión Católica TV Internacional live-streamed the procession on Facebook, letting hundreds of viewers know which street the clergy were visiting. People commented with their addresses or texted the clergy.

Some families who were driving through the neighborhood saw the priest, fully robed, and pulled over to join in the nearest prayer session. Carter, Quechol, Blatchford and Iurochkin knelt in prayer in driveways, front yards and on street corners, before again packing the car with the cross and thurible, which emanated incense.

Facebook has been a powerful tool to get word out about the visits, Carter said. Like many churches now closed because of COVID-19, the basilica is livestreaming its services. Churches throughout the Southeast have been [closed for weeks as the coronavirus continues to spread](#). In Tennessee and Georgia this week, at least 400 people have died from the virus.

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Going out into the community and working with families face-to-face brings encouragement, although the prayers and blessings from at least 6 feet away can seem odd at first, Carter said. The priest estimates he has visited at least 100 houses in the past week.

Street processions are common in the Catholic Church, especially on feast days. Each year, on the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Basilica holds a procession in the surrounding city. What the priests have been doing the past week with home visits is not dissimilar, Carter said.

"Instead of people coming to the church to process around, we are going out to the neighborhoods. In a way, it's what Jesus did."

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