

## **Sister Parish Town Hall (transcript)**

Tuesday, May 19, 7:00-8:00

### ***Opening prayer*** (Fr. Jeff)

### ***Overview*** (Cathy Kamp)

Panel Participants: pastor, Fr. Jim Schwartz; our parochial vicar, Fr. Jeff Chichester; our Holy Spirit Joint Council co-chair Mike Schifano; the St. Joseph's Joint Council co-chair Ned Sayegh; our two deacons, Ray Garbach and Duncan Harris; Lisa Bianculli, youth minister for both parishes; Jeanne Mooney, faith formation director for both parishes; Marc Magagnoli, network systems administrator for Holy Spirit and St. Joseph School; Nancy Veronesi, director of worship at St. Joseph's; and Cathy Kamp, pastoral associate at St. Joseph's.

#### Overview:

- A summary of your feedback to us during this coronavirus time of social distancing and suspension of public Mass;
- Some reflections from Fr. Jim, updates on staff and finances, and a summary of guidelines we have recently received from Bishop Matano for when Mass can be celebrated publicly;
- Questions and answers

### ***Summary of parishioner feedback*** (Nancy Veronesi)

Thank you to the several hundred parishioners from Holy Spirit and St. Joseph's who responded to our survey a few weeks ago. Your feedback is so very important to us at this time of the coronavirus pandemic and the suspension of public Mass. Like you, in so many aspects of your lives, we are innovating every single day to provide for your spiritual needs. We value your feedback in finding ways to help bring each of us closer to our Lord and encourage your participation in online liturgy and prayer. The opportunity to experience a Spiritual Communion is the ultimate purpose of all we do.

#### A quick glance at what we learned from the survey:

- 93% of people who responded are participating in online Mass
- More than 90% are participating in our Sunday Mass
- About half of you have become comfortable with online giving

- You said the most important ways we are staying in touch with you right now are: live streaming, online bulletins, parish emails, and Fr. Jim's video updates.

Some things that you have told us about the experience of the online Mass and other types of prayer:

- Many of you told us that the words on the screen and the choice of familiar music make it easy to participate and sing. You are able to be active participants.
- The words and the graphics have been distracting to some, because they aren't able to view what is happening on the altar, so I have modified the viewing to show the graphics and words and show what is happening on the altar in the background. The reason we use the graphics is because we always have new Catholics as well as children who are learning the mass parts. This really does assist them in participating. We will keep trying to improve this.
- So many of you attend as a family and even sit and stand as if at church. I spoke to one of our younger families in the parking lot a few days ago as they were biking through. As mom and I talked, she shared that they all dressed up for the Easter Mass online.
- So many of you have expressed how your spiritual life has grown from the online offerings, because you are able to be more present. On the other side of this, I want to say that it's perfectly fine if everyone is unable to be 100% attention to every word. Christ is present where two or three are gathered – it's because of all of you that our Domestic Church is alive and well! Parents and families, please kind to yourselves. You are not alone in trying to make the best of a challenging time!

Here's what you asked us to do that we have already been able to adapt:

- We modified the online donation slides during the live stream
- We added YouTube as a third platform in addition to the website and Facebook. We encourage you to subscribe to our channel and to like us on Facebook.
- Fr. Jim provided a video update on the status of each staff member.
- And both parishes are busy engaging clergy, staff and parishioners in making phone calls to reach out to other parishioners. Please let us know if there is someone in need of a phone call.

And here are a few areas that we need to work on in the weeks ahead:

- Parents asked for more faith-based activities for their children.
- And many people asked if we could offer more spiritual opportunities to learn and grow together as adults during this time. Fr. Jim had a great idea to start a weekly webinar series that will be facilitated by one staff member each week on varied Catholic topics – stay tuned for when that will start – we are very excited to bring that to you.
- Some didn't know about so many daily online opportunities and some have had problems finding them. Some also had questions about when our churches are open, accessing archived videos and other similar questions. We will work harder to communicate and get the word out in many ways in the days to come.

You also had lots of questions in the survey and in preparation for this town hall about the Mass, receiving Holy Communion and our liturgical ministries, and Fr. Jim is going to address those by sharing some updates from Bishop Matano. But first, he has a few reflections to share.

***Pastor's Address*** (Fr. Jim)

Thank you for being with us tonight. This is a day of Easter joy as we are about to celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord this Thursday and then the great Feast of Pentecost.

When are we going to reopen the Church and have Mass again? Sadly, the timing of that is still unknown but I assure you our Bishops are working with New York State to determine when we can again have Mass with all of you present.

We are anxious to worship together as a community but, prudence dictates, we do this in a way that respects the health of our community. Some would say we are cowardly for acting too slowly; and on the other end of the spectrum, some may suggest we are reckless if we move too quickly. We pray for the virtue of prudence in moving ahead that respects needed health safeguards and respects our desire to celebrate the sacraments.

In the meantime, I find it spiritually uplifting for myself to pray on the holy longing we all feel to again to be with the community, and the holy longing you have to receive the Eucharist. There is one thing I know deep in my soul: Covid-19 does

not keep us in social isolation from God's abundant graces that are showered upon us. And, because of the faith that unites us across two parishes, even while physically distant from one another, we may be spiritually connected to one another as a one sister parish community.

So, I reflect on a few questions in my prayer and my long walks these days:

- How is this virus a wake-up call for us?
- Are we willing to slow down and embrace solitude?
- How are our parish families using this as a blessed time to more intentionally develop households of faith in family life?
- Does this pandemic create graced ways for our two parish communities to collaborate and pray together as one?
- As always, is gratitude a way of life? Are we living in gratitude for the blessings of life – family, health, faith, friends, faith community.
- What have we learned in this time of Holy Longing?

I leave you with those questions to ponder on your own – I'd love to hear from you about what is spiritually uplifting or especially troubling in these times.

Now let me provide some updates on staff, finances, and what Mass may look like in a transitory period.

Staff: Jeanne Mooney is now faith formation director of both Holy Spirit and St Joseph's. Lisa Bianculli is youth minister for both Holy Spirit and St Joseph's. And with regard to Music Ministry at St. Joseph's, now that Jacob Fuhrman has resigned, I will collaborate with Nancy Veronesi and Susan Gividen and some of you to determine our path forward. Dictated by prudence, we need to be patient about when the choirs will become a part of our liturgy again. Your input is welcome.

Parish Finances: In both parishes, parishioners have responded very generously to on-line giving and mailing in collection envelopes. Thank you, thank you. What a beautiful sign this is of our commitment to our faith communities. Both parishes have received forgivable loans from the government Payroll Protection Program.

Social Media – During this time without public Mass, live streaming Masses, Facebook connections, YouTube – have been a great blessing to our spirituality and parish ministries. The Holy Spirit has been at work in our virtual communications in that our reach has extended beyond our parish community. While we long to see your smiling faces again, for as long as we need to, we look

to continue our mission of evangelizing online while re-imagining our parish ministries in this new reality.

Mass with the Faithful Present: Bishop Matano has written a letter to his priests and deacons about what we can expect when we can resume Mass with yourselves. I will do my best to summarize a number of key points. The most important point is that Bishop Matano has one focus: to celebrate Holy Mass and the Sacraments of the Church with our people while taking all reasonable precautions. He also assures us that as more information about timing becomes available from New York State, we will be informed. In the meantime, he provided us with a number of areas where we can begin to work on re-imagining what Mass will look like when we can celebrate it with you.

Remote considerations were laid out including:

- We are to determine the best communications vehicles to reach all parishioners about how and when we can return.
- We are asked to review the Mass schedule to accommodate the faithful not only with Sunday Masses but also with daily Mass which he encourages you to consider as an alternative to Sunday Mass to accommodate as many people as possible with social distancing.
- And, for pastors with multiple churches, we are asked to identify one site that has:
  - ample seating,
  - most facilitates social distancing,
  - is easily accessible,
  - and can easily be cleaned.

In the weeks ahead, we will be assessing our options in terms of space, continuing to live stream for those who cannot attend, and cleaning. We will keep you informed of all decisions as they are made.

The Bishop also addressed cleaning:

- Processes need to be developed for cleaning between each Mass, including all pews and surfaces, following CDC disinfecting instructions.

Physical preparations of the space include:

- Removing all unnecessary furniture;
- Hymnals, missalettes and paper will be removed from the pews;

- Baptismal and holy water fonts are to remain empty;
- You will need to wear your own face mask;
- We will not be able to pass the collection basket; again, your willingness to give online or by mailing envelopes will continue to be very helpful.

Bishop Matano writes that liturgical ministers will be limited:

- We will need to ask all vulnerable individuals to refrain from fulfilling their usual ministries.
- Liturgical ministries will be limited to:
  - One priest
  - One deacon
  - Concelebrating priests
  - One lector
  - One musician and one cantor—choirs will not be possible during the transitory period
  - Youth or adult altar servers will not be possible during this time
  - Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are utilized only if necessary
- For now, we see ourselves continuing with our priests, deacons, and staff only – for everyone’s safety.

I know many things I have just shared will be disappointing. But I thank Bishop Matano and the diocesan staff who have presented us with much good information to work with. Yes, we could choose to focus on the parts we don’t like but let’s focus on the positive: plans are being made for us to celebrate together again. It won’t be what we have always been accustomed to but it will be a step forward toward all of us being able to again share in the Eucharist.

And however we address the guideline of worshipping together at one site during this transitory period, I urge you to see this as an opportunity for all of us to unite in prayer and worship as one community of faith. Throughout this time we have started the live streaming of Mass by saying that while we are socially distant we are one community of faith, Holy Spirit and St. Joseph’s—we are united by our Catholic faith. I am resolved to make this a Spirit-driven opportunity for our two communities and not a burden. Please join me in praying that the Lord in his wisdom will unite us in his peace, his love and our love for one another. Amen.

***Closing prayer*** (Deacon Ray)