

January 7, 2021

Dear Parishioners:

In the pandemic, St Bernadette Parish and School turned to technology, creativity, and faith. As the virus upended normal activities and routines across the United States, our parish, school, and organizations had to quickly and continuously find ways to adapt. For starters, this primarily involved technology: livestreaming Masses, teaching virtually, and meetings on Zoom platforms. As time went on, we were able to have outdoor confessions, in-person Masses and welcomed students back to our classrooms with reduced crowd sizes.

When the pandemic first hit the Archdiocese of Seattle announced there would be no public Masses as of early March. Bishops issued dispensations for the Sunday Mass obligation. Parishes with varying degrees of technical know-how, set up parish channels for the first time or dusted off their Facebook pages for online streaming. I met with our parish staff and asked: "What can we do to stay connected?" We decided that with the proper equipment, the parish could begin livestreaming Masses. We purchased a microphone and camera and were able to start living streaming Saturday Masses with a maximum of 10 people. We also streamed the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and the celebrations of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

The parish closure also meant functions such as religious education classes and meetings had to move to an online format. Many people became familiar with Zoom, an online platform they might not have heard of a year ago. The internet is the blessing of all blessings, but we were aware it did not enable us to reach everyone.

After several months of Mass closure, we realized our parishioners were "hungry for spiritual connection and for the grounding nourishment liturgy can provide at this critical and chaotic time." In May when the Archdiocese announced resumption of public Masses at 25% church occupancy, it was great to welcome an average of 70-90 people at Mass. Those in attendance registered and took a little squirt of hand sanitizer. As a priest, during Communion, I also sanitized my hands while distributing Communion. Parishioners respected county guidelines for social distancing and people were helpful with hospitality.

The pandemic has been a challenge for our community, but it also has helped us understand how important faith is. During the pandemic, especially the entire time when church was shut down, I realized just how much the Eucharist meant to me and how much being fed by word and bread meant to my faith life. I shared this at the New

Year's liturgies. I have seen people kneeling outside our church in front of the glass doors, praying for the chance to receive Holy Communion and to be close to God.

Yearning for the Eucharist presents an opportunity for the church to begin a new effort of evangelization and catechesis. As the public celebration of Mass gradually expands, church leaders determine how best to encourage people to reengage in parish life. Our Archbishop announced the Year of the Eucharist in the early part of 2020. Our Holy Father invited us to the Year of St. Joseph on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

I have a deep concern about people returning to Sunday Mass after the pandemic. Without their return the financial outlook for church entities -- parishes and schools -- will be grim. Our Catholic schools have seen this firsthand, with more than 100 schools closing this year, many because of financial stress. This fall, many Catholic schools including ours were able to reopen for in-person education. Several health and safety protocols were put in place including room dividers, hand sanitizers, disinfecting wipes, face masks and gloves. For younger students, recess also was different, with students prevented from playing on the equipment or engaging in contact sports. School lunches have not been served.

Catholic Schools Week will be celebrated the last week of January. If your children are not enrolled at our school, check out what we are doing. Come for a tour. Join us as we make steps to move forward.

Church and school leaders have maintained that the key in all of this is flexibility. Our Principal has stressed that reopening requires strict adherence to new protocols and the flexibility to switch gears if necessary. This wisdom applies to all of parish life.

I am grateful for the patience our faithful parishioners, parish/school staff, and even the acceptance that children and youth have shown throughout the pandemic. I ask for that to continue because it is such a complex matter and there is no precedent for it. We begin 2021 and so many things are different. We await the day when we have more music at Mass, parishioners again have a great hunger to be at the weekly liturgies, families see the value of our Catholic School, and we enjoy large community gatherings again.

Present Mass Schedule:

Saturday 5:00 pm
Sunday 9:30 am
Wednesday 8:00 am

Blessings in this New Year,

John J. Ludvik

Rev. John J. Ludvik, Pastor