

Dear Parishioners,

I sincerely hope that all of you are doing well and staying healthy! I wish to resume my weekly email update after taking a one week hiatus last week. The reason that I did so was due to the wonderful news of our Diocese having been appointed a new Bishop! Bishop-Elect Michel Mulloy is currently the Diocesan Administrator of Rapid City, SD. I have had the opportunity to meet him, and I am sure that he will be a wonderful bishop and shepherd for us. Praise God for His providential care of us!

I would also like to update you all on a few other matters of importance. First of all, the COVID-19 protocols that have been put in place continue to be in effect, meaning that 2/3 of the pews at our churches are roped off in order to provide for social distancing, hand sanitizer is available at all entrances, Holy Communion continues to be distributed immediately after the conclusion of the Mass proper to provide an opportunity for those who do not wish to receive Holy Communion to easily depart, and no collection is being taken by the ushers. I would like to emphasize a few things here.

First, please remember that we are limited to how many people we can have inside the upstairs church during any given Mass right now. In both parishes, that number is between 90-100. Once that number of people have arrived for Mass, any further people that arrive will be ushered to the social hall where they will be able to participate with the Mass through a live-stream of the Mass that is taking place upstairs. Those in the social hall will also be able to receive Holy Communion after Mass. I wish to remind parishioners of this to encourage you to consider arriving a bit early for Mass. As we have seen in the last two weekends, the number of tourists/visitors at Mass is steadily increasing, and if you wish to be seated upstairs, you may want to plan to get to church a little bit early. Also, please remember that any parishioner is always welcome to choose to be seated downstairs in the social hall and participate through the live-stream, even if there is still room upstairs in the church, if that makes you more comfortable due to social distancing opportunities, etc. *But please be prepared for the fact that once the capacity of people that we can permit upstairs is full, all further attendees who arrive will have to be seated downstairs.* And, speaking of the live-stream, please be aware that while we are continuing to live-stream the Sunday celebration of the Mass at 8:30am Sunday mornings, if you wish to watch the recording of that Mass at a later time, it will not be available for viewing after the live-stream is finished until the next day, Monday morning.

Second, as more and more people begin attending Mass in person, there is a need for us now to change how we approach the reception of Holy Communion. During this time of social distancing, we cannot come forward to receive Holy Communion in two side-by-side lines as we had previously, because there is not nearly enough distance between the two lines. So, starting this weekend, for the distribution of Holy Communion, the people seated on the St. Joseph statue side of the church will come forward to receive Holy Communion first, and when they are finished, those on the Blessed Virgin Mary statue side of the Church will come forward. This will allow for one single-file line to form for receiving Holy Communion. Please remember to keep six feet between you and the person in front of you in the line for Holy Communion unless you are members of the same household.

Third, one of the times of the Mass that has been the most difficult for people to properly observe the necessary social distancing has been after the distribution of Holy Communion and secondary blessing, when the congregation is leaving the Church. Please be self-aware, everyone, that as you are leaving church, it's easy for people to begin to "stack-up" close together as the speed that people can exit through the doors is not fast enough for the size of the crowd trying to leave. So, this requires a bit extra conscientiousness on each of our parts to make room for each other, and courteously to provide for social distancing by not crowding too closely while trying to leave. I appreciate greatly your help in making this work! Thank you!

Finally, as this fiscal year draws to a close, a quick note about our parish's financial situation. Despite the shut-down and limited capacity for Masses, due to your incredibly generous donations, our parish has been able to meet our financial obligations during this fiscal year. I thank you for your continued generosity to our parish and humbly ask that you please continue in these efforts of sacrificial self-giving as this allows us to continue to serve you smoothly and well. Thank you!

Please be assured of my prayers for all of you, and may God bless you now and always!

Fr. Steve Laflamme