



12521 Inwood Road
Dallas, TX 75244
stritaparish.net

23 March 2020

Dear St. Rita Community:

As we each hunker down these next several days, isolated but fighting this virus together, I want you to know I'm praying for you each day, remembering you in the Mass I celebrate. I encourage you to pray for each other and for a quick end to this pandemic. Today, I just wanted to give you an update on the community, especially before the order to "shelter in place" takes effect.

The good news I want to share with you first is that our fellow parishioner, Tony Kruse, **has tested negative for COVID-19**. After several days of uncertainty and two tests (one administered by Dallas County and one privately), we can now say he does not have COVID-19. These have been trying and quite frightening days for he and his family, and they are relieved he's now home, hunkered down like the rest of us. **Now, about this, let me be very clear:** I am deeply grateful how the Kruse family quickly engaged our School community, allowing us to act responsibly to protect our students, families and faculty. Shutting the School down suddenly like we did, we now see was quite the right thing to do. I couldn't have asked for more responsible action on their part, because it enabled us to take the swift action necessary to keep everyone safe. As things unfolded, it turns out we simply got a head-start on rest of the city. But aside from this: I am deeply grateful to them for thinking about the rest of us in this community and acting to keep us safe!

Regarding the closure of our campus. When we close the campus this evening, March 23 at 7:00pm, all the buildings on campus will remain locked and armed. There will be no business conducted at St. Rita until the shelter-in-place order is lifted. I am sorry to say (but it's for the greater good) that we will cease adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the church during this time, and no longer offer fixed times for Confessions. We will continue to monitor the campus randomly in person and via our camera system, which we can view from off campus wirelessly. We are also members the Schreiber Expanded Neighborhood Patrol, and so we feel the campus will be secure.

You may still call us, however. We have rerouted all calls to our receptionist who is now working at home. During business hours (8:30am to 4:30pm), you can call and expect someone to answer. We will do our best to respond to you in a timely manner to meet your needs. **Also, in case of an emergency, you may still contact a priest** by calling the mainline and following the prompts to the ER line. You may, of course, also email whomever you wish to contact.

Regarding pastoral care. We are putting the final touches on what we're calling **St. Rita Care Ministries Outreach**. Basically, it's a special "buddy program" to create supportive relationships among St. Rita parishioners during the coronavirus crisis, and, hopefully, beyond. The immediate goal is to pair young individuals and families with at-risk members of our community to create bonds of spiritual, emotional, and material support (from a safe distance). The process itself is simple: identify at-risk individuals who would like to participate; identify willing individuals and families; pair them into buddies; and provide a toolkit of guidance on how we can help support each other. If you know of anyone who might benefit from this ministry, or if can help, please either call us or visit this webpage for more information: <https://stritaparish.net/care-ministries-outreach>



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Regarding the School. Tomorrow St. Rita Catholic School resumes instruction via “E-Learning.” Every single member of our Faculty and Staff have worked tirelessly this past week (spring break simply vanished) to ensure we can transform our mode of instruction to these peculiar circumstances. I want to thank the outstanding women and men of our School for their dedication and work. **Now, again, let me be very clear: This week educators across the nation begin an experiment in education never yet attempted.** As schools and families begin this quite daunting task, let me encourage you to be positive, as we are all basically learning as we go. And, let me assure you: There WILL be hiccups and mistakes. We WILL fumble the ball. This WILL NOT be perfect. It WILL take time for us to get comfortable with all this. Thus, I encourage (in fact, I insist) you keep a positive attitude in front of your children and when engaging our Faculty and Staff. Refrain, for example, from publicly scrutinizing or criticizing your child’s teacher on social media, either what they teach or how they teach. As I said, we are all pushing the envelope, and it’s hard enough on everyone as it is without demoralizing each other. So please, do your part to encourage solidarity and a good spirit. And, of course, pray a lot. And adore your beautiful children, even as they’re driving you crazy. Because they are what hope looks like.

Also, all School events are cancelled through the end of April. We have not yet cancelled any Parish events beyond April 3; but we will, obviously, revisit that decision soon.

Regarding communication. The best source for accurate information from either the Parish or the School will be the websites for each. Our parish website is <https://stritaparish.net/> and our School website is www.strita.net. We will continue to post content on our YouTube Channel and social media (Facebook and Twitter), so please do follow us. **And, on livestreaming Mass:** we now have a dedicated ethernet cable for livestreaming, so we should do a better job in coming days. Again, a lot of our ministry this past week has been far beyond our comfort zone. Thanks for your patience!

Regarding finances. THANK YOU to the many of you who have stepped up financially at this time: either by fulfilling your 2020 pledge early, giving more than you originally pledged, or by simply continuing to give consistently. Also, in addition to the spending cuts I mentioned in my last letter, our Finance Council has also been at working (mostly via email and phone) thinking of ways to navigate these uncertain waters. We hope to meet virtually sometime very soon. In short, be assured our Finance Council is excellent, comprised of some of the sharpest financial minds in Dallas, and so we will see ourselves through these times well, no doubt.

For our part, the best thing we can do is continue to contribute. I understand the economic impact our entire country will experience; and, as I said, I pray not only for your spiritual good but also your material well-being. However, I urge you to continue to support the Parish as well as other faith communities and charitable institutions in this city. Because these institutions, and ours, do an enormous amount of good. For they sake of the city, they must survive. And again, you can contribute to the Parish in two ways:

By contributing through our **online** service WeShare at the following link:
<https://stritacc.weshareonline.org/>

Or, by **mailing** your contribution to the following address:



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Finally, thank you again. We are, quite honestly, all exhausted. However, we are filled with a strange joy, mixed with our nerves and sadness. Because, at least for me, it's making me rediscover essentials and priorities, that is, God and the people I love—my family and you. And so, remain in prayer and remain in hope. And remember that's possible, because you remain in Christ and he in you. Prayers for you!

Yours, in Christ,
Fr. Joshua J. Whitfield
Pastoral Administrator
St. Rita Catholic Community