

Dear parishioners and friends of St. Joseph Parish,

It is most lamentable that we are unable to offer public Masses on a daily basis during the COVID-19 pandemic that is sweeping the world. Many of the same solutions applied to the influenza pandemic of 1918 are being applied today, such as isolation and the closing of public spaces. We are, however, blessed with the scientific and technological advances that we have in 2020 and pray for a swift end to this pestilence.

St. Joseph Church clergy and staff are busy working to establish ways for us to continue worshipping and praying together despite the importance of physically separating ourselves for a while. The pandemic has challenged us to find new ways to stay connected as a Parish, as a “communion of communities.”

This week, the Parish’s audio-visual company is preparing the Church for Live streaming of our private Masses. An internet cable has already been installed and work is taking place to install the appropriate equipment, hardware, and software to enable Live streaming of our regularly scheduled daily and weekend Masses. Our hope is to begin Live streaming Masses this weekend (March 28/29). If that does not happen, then we are looking to Palm Sunday.

This project has been considered as one we had hoped to accomplish in our upgrade to the Parish campus. The recent pandemic, however, has prompted an immediate need. We are unable to say at this point when our Church will be allowed to open again for public Masses. Our hope and prayers, of course, are that it happens sooner rather than later.

The St. Joseph Church building remains closed for the installation of the camera and equipment for the new audio/video streaming system. The Carmen Lucia Buck Religious Education Building remains closed in order to undergo a deep and thorough cleaning and sanitization, with approved disinfectants, following guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

At the direction of the Diocese of Bridgeport, the Rectory Office is closed for walk-in service, but we are not closed as a Parish to the spiritual needs of our community. Pastoral care and Parish office business will continue under controlled conditions, including telephone calls, email, and other means.

At all times, but especially now, the safety and well-being of our Parish community is our primary concern. We urge you to heed seriously the directives of government officials and health professionals about how to curtail the spread of the Coronavirus.

As these officials advise, we really do need to stay at home so that we can curtail the spread of the virus, especially those who are at special risk from COVID-19 (over 65, weakened immune system, or other chronic health condition, etc.)

It is a very challenging time for most of us. Yet we are still members of St. Joseph Church, and we will, as a Parish, get through these difficult days by calling upon God’s divine assistance in prayer. We can also reach out and be connected through telephone and internet with our small faith sharing RENEW groups, our Parish organizations and ministries, and our neighborhoods.

Do you know of parishioner who needs help? If you know anyone who may be alone or is in need of assistance (such as getting groceries brought to their door, or a simple talk on the phone to check on our elderly, for example), please be advised that we are forming an outreach ministry team of dedicated parishioners who are willing to be of help during this time.

We are all called to comfort and reassure one another that we are still members of God’s holy people, making our way through new Lenten lands this year that are uncharted. As difficult as it is for us not to be able to gather together physically, our callings as Christians are clear: to love our neighbor as ourselves and to care for one another compassionately.

Many people in our world cannot slow down. With the hectic pace of life of most of us, we need to ask for the grace to live in the present moment. Mass concludes with “Go in peace.” It feels often, however, like the response, “Thanks be to God,” is meant to include “so we can be off and running.”

May God’s grace help us this Lent to change and be more intentional in our daily lives. As we learn more about how to connect virtually, I hope, as well, that we will be inspired with new, meaningful ways to celebrate our Catholic faith and identities. I pray that we will know of Christ’s

presence in the space between us-- the Word proclaimed from the Scriptures which comes in opening your family's Bible, in praying together as the "domestic church," and in praying individually, as well.

This time of social separation – a fast from so much of what we enjoy and find meaningful, a wilderness of fear, chaos, and uncertainty – has plunged us into a deeper Lent that we ever dreamed of earlier in the year.

It is also a time of grace and opportunity. Now is the opportunity to be different and stay healthy and get the rest we need. Some commentators have noted that the understanding of the Sabbath rest was being eroded in every life; that our society was in a war against rest. Now is the opportunity to be different. May we reach out to God in prayer and to others with open hearts: by phone, online, and by giving alms. What may not have been possible in the frenetic pace of our lives may now be possible – more quality time with family – making meals together, making things for others, reading, writing, and making music, and clearing the clutter from our lives to concentrate on what is essential.

May we cherish our dearest ones; may we give thanks for the beauty we see in our world as our season changes from winter into spring; may we give thanks for the blessings of each day.

May we ponder what this pandemic teaches about our absolute interdependence with every being on this planet, and how we can honor that profound reality in a more life-giving way. May we be gentle with ourselves and others. May we remember that God is in our midst and nearer than the breath we breathe.

You are in my daily prayers. Please pray for me and for one another. In these strange and frightening times, we are called to be Christ's hands and heart, signs of compassion and hope in our hurting world. We are learning what that means; we will surely make mistakes, but by the grace of God we will prevail.

I know that some in our community of faith are facing intense income insecurity because of event cancellations due to the coronavirus. If you have lost your job or regular income, please contact Catholic Charities so that the Church can assist you.

If you have a reliable income at this time, please continue to practice your stewardship and make your worship offerings either through Online giving or by mailing in your envelopes. The church still has expenses even though we are not offering public Masses. We are paying our staff through this time.

Moreover, the cost of Live streaming was not planned. Despite that and given the seriousness of this pandemic, we are moving ahead and began the installation as soon as our technicians were available. Because this expense was unplanned, I sincerely hope that you will appreciate what we are attempting to accomplish here and will be as generous as your means permit to help fund this critical program.

We have contacted our envelope company and requested them to move the Annual Parish Collection envelope into the next set of envelopes to be mailed. We normally have this collection in October each year, but we are beginning early, given our unprecedented circumstances. We are requesting an early fulfillment of this Annual Appeal if it is within your means. This collection is earmarked for the cost of the equipment and installation for Live streaming. Please be as generous as your means allow.

May the Eternal God continue to bless you and hold you under the shelter of His wings,

Devotedly in Christ,
Rev. Samuel V. Scott
Pastor