March 13, 2020

J.M.J.

Dear Parishioners,

I’m writing this letter on Friday, the 13th. I am not sure what significance that holds. I hope none! And it is all subject to change!

We have all been following with great interest the information that continues to come to us about COVID-19, commonly known as the Coronavirus. Like many of you I struggle to discern what exactly is going on. The situation seems to change from hour to hour! Our local government leaders have given us some concrete direction. So has the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

Therefore, as pastor of Saint Luke I want to make sure that our people are protected. At his morning Mass this (Friday) morning, Pope Francis prayed for all those affected by the Coronavirus and prayed in particular for pastors who need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to do what is best for the souls entrusted to their care. He also noted that “drastic measures are not always good.”

We are making some adjustments to parish life only out of an abundance of caution. I know of no serious threats because someone here has been exposed to the Coronavirus or the flu. I would rather be overly cautious than err on the other side. The safety and health of our people is most important. But, yes, there will be some disruption and inconvenience.

In consultation with the rest of our parish staff and leaders—especially the administration of Saint Luke Catholic Preschool and School—I want to announce the following:

**Sacramental Life:**

At least for now, there will be no change in our schedule of Masses, confessions, or other opportunities for prayer and worship. The Perpetual Adoration Chapel will be open as usual. We will have the Way of the Cross on Friday evenings during Lent. The daily Communion Services, praying of the rosary and the Liturgy of the Hours will continue as usual. All Masses will take place in the main church until further notice. People will have more room to “distance themselves” from others. Other services will take place in the *Magnificat* Chapel as usual—attendance for these is much smaller.

Our weekend (Sunday) Mass schedule will remain the same. The governor has asked for a ban on all non-essential gatherings of over 250-people. Catholics would not consider Mass to be a “non essential” gathering. By this I mean to explain why we feel we can continue to offer Mass.

But let me be clear that what I do not mean is that attending Mass during this critical time is essential. It is not. Archbishop Thompson has dispensed everyone—regardless of age or how one happens to be feeling that day—from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass at least through April 3. One could be infected with the virus yet not exhibit any symptoms for days.

In all cases now or any time, if anyone feels even the slightest symptoms of the flu or other illness—stay home! If someone of any age feels vulnerable or has medical condition that might place them at risk in any way—stay home! This has always been the case long before we even heard of the Coronavirus. For those who do come to any Mass, it would be a good idea to “spread out.”

**Saint Luke Catholic School and Preschool, SMRE (Sunday Morning Religious Education), and Youth Ministry:**

Our educational administrators have been in frequent contact with families for some time now through the usual channels. Our school and preschool are closed today (Friday). We plan to reopen on Monday, April 6, at the conclusion of Spring Break. Stay tuned; this might change.

In the meantime, beginning Monday, March 16, our school children will begin E-Learning. These days can be “counted” as school days. The governor has changed the number of days schools must be in session from 180 to 160. School families know what all this entails and are in contact with our school staff.

Since schools are closed it only follows that all extracurricular school activities are cancelled during this time period. This would include all sports, sport practices, scout meetings, the school musical, and so forth.

All the schools our Saint Luke children attend are closed until at least April 6; it only makes sense to suspend SMRE Classes and Youth Ministry activities until after that date.

It seems to me that to make this effective all parents and families will need to sort of “self-quarantine.” If students are not in school but are spending time together at the mall, the movie theater, or some sports facility—this will be counterproductive.

**Parish Life:**

For now, the parish offices will remain open on the usual schedule. If this changes, everyone will be notified. However, we ask that as much business as possible be conducted via email or phone. Our maintenance staff will be deep cleaning all of the areas of our facility to stay ahead of this issue. If necessary, some of our parish staff can work from home. All of them would be able to check their voice mail and email from home if that becomes necessary.

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis has mandated that **all other meetings** be cancelled. Follow this **Rule of Thumb**: If it involves prayer and takes place in the church or the chapel—it is probably on schedule. If it is not in church or in the chapel—it is cancelled. (I’m sorry, but I’m going to sort of enjoy the “no meetings” restriction!)

**Generally Speaking:**

I realize that these actions may seem extreme and will cause hardship. But again I would rather be criticized for an abundance of caution as opposed to taking things too lightly. Lent is a time for penance and fasting. We might think of all these good things—of which we will be deprived—as a form of fasting for Lent 2020. When we get back to normal perhaps we will have a better appreciation of these things we will do without.

I love Saint Luke Parish. I am especially mindful of families who have challenges with child care or lost income during this time period. Yet I have no doubt that we will come through this global pandemic by looking out for and taking care of one another. We always have.

If you ever need anything, especially the Anointing of the Sick or the Last Rites, do not hesitate to contact your priests at Saint Luke. Don’t worry; we won’t tell you we are only working from home!

One of our North Deanery school principals shared this little prayer with us this week. It was written by a Spanish priest. I think it is a good one!

*Lord, help me
Be prepared, but not anxious.
Be aware, but not desperate.
Be vigilant, but not in fear.
Be joyful, but not clueless.
Be faithful, but not careless.
Lord, be my hope and strength*

*Our Lady of Providence, pray for us!*

*Saint Joseph, Protector of the Universal Church, pray for us!*

Of one thing I am convinced; of one thing I am certain: Providence never fails!

Faithfully yours in the Providence that so far had never failed us,

Msgr. Joseph F. Schaedel