

March 17, 2020 – The Feast of St Patrick

Dear Parishioners,

Each day brings about new changes during the Coronavirus COVID-19 Epidemic. At St. Francis of Assisi Parish, School and PSR, we have been responding accordingly and I want to thank you for your assistance and understanding as we navigate these new developments. Below you will find what we plan to do immediately. Some of these plans may change as new information is gathered and new directives are given. Through it all, though, we trust in the Lord, our Rock. He will be our refuge and our strength.

The quick answer to all is:

All Public Masses, Elementary School, Parish School of Religion, CYC events and all other events and meetings on the SFA Campus are cancelled at least until April 6.

Here are more of the details:

HOLY MASS:

Archbishop Carlson has said the following: *“In order to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community, I am mandating the suspension of all public Masses in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, beginning with Masses following this communication today, March 16, 2020. Pending updates and guidance from local and state government and health officials, we have preliminary plans to resume Masses beginning April 6; however, we will re-evaluate at a later date.”*

NO PUBLIC Masses will be celebrated at St Francis until further notice.

All Catholics in the Archdiocese of St Louis are dispensed from their obligation to attend Sunday Mass for the next three weekends (March 21/22, March 28/29 and April 4/5.)

The Sunday 9 a.m. Mass will be celebrated in PRIVATE with no congregation, but will be on Facebook via "Facebook Live" on the St. Francis of Assisi Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/stfrancisstl/>). We do not have other live streaming capabilities but you can watch Mass on television on EWTN or other websites.

I encourage you to still keep Sunday holy as it is still the Lord's Day. It would be good to make time as a family to pray together. Whether you watch the Mass online or television, you can still read the Scripture readings and pray with them. Visit the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for the Scriptures. There are also links for reflections and other materials. <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/032220.cfm>

You are highly encouraged to make a spiritual communion since you cannot receive Jesus physically. A Spiritual Communion is a prayer from the heart asking God for the same graces one receives when one physically receives the Sacred Host.

Spiritual Communion Prayer

My Jesus,
I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment
receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace You as if You were already there
and unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from You.
Amen.

PRIVATE PRAYER:

The church will be opened every day from 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. for private prayer. There will be NO public celebrations of the liturgy of any kind. You may simply pray quietly. Please remember to maintain the silence and be respectful of those in church. I kindly ask all conversation be moved outside the church as to maintain a spirit of silence for those who wish to pray.

You are encouraged to sit at least 6 feet apart from another person to maintain the recommended social distancing.

If you choose to come to church at other hours, please use the side door with the entry code under the bell tower. Do NOT open the door for anyone. Any parishioner who would like access and does not have the code should call the Rectory Office to determine if you can be admitted. Only registered parishioners in our database will be given the code.

EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION:

While the Eucharistic Adoration Chapel is closed during this time, the church is still open and Jesus will be in the tabernacle in church. When Jesus is exposed in the monstrance in the Chapel that is called Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. However, we also can have adoration of the Lord present in the tabernacle. So please remember that Jesus is still with you when you come to church even if you don't see Him in the monstrance.

HOLY WATER:

Sacramentals are a powerful weapon for us as Catholics. Since we do not have Holy Water available in the large container in the vestibule, the priests are happy to bless some for you. If you want Holy Water for your home, bring water in your own container to church and leave it on the table in the vestibule. The priests will bless the water once a day in the morning and your containers can be picked up later in the day.

EVENTS:

Since we have been asked to suspend all public Masses, it makes sense to cancel all other events, gatherings, meetings, etc. on our campus. This also includes cancelling the fish fry. All events outside of the private prayer opportunities in church are cancelled. Please reach out to your Parish Ministry Leader with any questions you may have.

GIFT OF TREASURE:

I want to thank you in advance for continuing your weekly contributions to the offertory. I know these are challenging times for all and if you are still able to make your tithe it will greatly help our Parish continue our mission and maintain our operations. If you use envelopes, please mail them in or drop them off at the rectory. This may also be a good time to use online giving. If you would like to sign up for electronic offertory, visit <https://www.osvonlinegiving.com/722>.

WEDDINGS, FUNERALS AND BAPTISMS:

These liturgies will still continue at this time but in a simplified manner. I will evaluate each case and determine what is best. The Archbishop has recommended that attendance be limited to immediate family. We can also look at rescheduling these events if possible.

RECTORY OFFICE HOURS:

At this point, the Rectory will maintain regular office hours. We are here for you during this time and want to be available to assist you in any way we can. I just ask that if you are sick or experiencing any symptoms of illness to remain at home. Please call the Rectory at 314-487-5736 if you have any questions.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

Our Principal, Mrs. Bartolotta is meeting with the teachers on Monday and Tuesday, March 23-24, to finish developing and fully implementing the school's distance learning plan. If you are a school family, please look for a separate communication from Mrs. Bartolotta on Monday afternoon outlining the full plan and further directions.

PARISH SCHOOL OF RELIGION (PSR):

Our Coordinator, Mrs. Weber will be working on ways that parents can continue their child's religious education from home. She will send email communication as soon as possible.

STAYING CONNECTED:

I have asked the staff to work on ways we can all stay connected. As these options are worked out we will communicate them to you. For now I want to highlight our FORMED platform where you can access many different Catholic videos, books and online learning opportunities. Check out this website for all the content: <https://sfastl.org/adult-faith/>

ARCHDIOCESE:

You can stay up to date on all the news coming from the Archdiocese at their website: <https://www.archstl.org/coronavirus>.

ASSITING THOSE IN NEED:

If you or someone you know is in need during these difficult times here are some ways we can continue to work to support individuals who depend on charitable efforts for food and other necessities.

Catholic Charities of St. Louis: dial (314) 367-5500 or email info@ccstl.org

Society of St. Vincent de Paul operations: Person-to-person home visits are temporarily suspended, but the SFA Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conference is still taking calls. SVdP's goal is to keep as many food pantries functioning as possible with altered procedures such as porch deliveries, bagging and picking up food, and distributing food vouchers or gift cards to those in need. Those in need locally should call 314-289-6101, ext 2232.

CONCLUSION:

The impact of COVID-19 continues to grow every day, and I realize that all of us are greatly concerned about our own personal health, the health of our families, and of others whom we love, and we should be. In light of this and other announcements, our lives are being impacted in ways that most of us could have never imagined. As people of faith, we must continue to pull together to generously support one another.

In this season of Lent, I ask that we also increase our prayers, fasting, and almsgiving so that the Heavenly Father will continue to pour forth His love, strength, and protection upon us as we move through the challenges and uncertainty brought about by COVID-19.

Mary, Health of the Sick and our Mother, pray for us.

Please know that my prayers are with all of you.

God bless,

Fr. Yates