

Dear Parishioners,

I hope everyone had a safe and relaxing Labor Day Weekend!

We wish all of our parish students well as they return to school. May they have a safe and healthy school year. May it be filled with much learning, as well as a time of building friendships and learning to overcome the obstacles that come their way. I also want to thank and commend the teachers both in the public school and our own parish school for their courage, commitment and dedication to serving our young people. I want to encourage our parents to be watchful of their children before sending the youngsters off to school. If they are showing any signs of Covid-19 please keep them home for a few days. We all have a role in keeping our students, teachers and staff safe throughout this school year. Let's be respectful of each other and as a school community, we can learn what it means to respect each person and their needs.

I want to thank the many people who have made donations to our school. Because of their generosity, we have been able to purchase the same type of cleaner that we use in Church, which sprays a fine mist into the air and clings to the classroom furniture to kill germs. Each classroom is cleaned at least twice a day- the first cleaning takes place 4 hours into the school day and then in the evening once the students have left the building. We have purchased portable hand washers and are waiting for their arrival. These hand stations will be placed in each room, thus allowing the students to wash their hands without leaving the classroom.

We recently had a parish staff meeting involving Mr. Ward, Mr. Beers, the office staff and myself to discuss how the Covid-19 crisis might impact parish life. This was based upon discussion with the Mecosta County Health Dept. and the state's required emergency preparedness plan. The state has mandated that office employees stagger their time so as to limit the time when we are altogether. Anyone entering the parish office must wear a mask and if they are there for any significant time must complete a Covid-19 symptom checker form. As a result of this crisis, the parish office will remain closed on Wednesdays and Fridays. I intend to either be in the office or the rectory, especially on those days, to primarily answer the phone. I ask that all parish business be done on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

Another significant item of discussion at the staff meeting was a conversation with the Health Department which advised us to be prepared for a shutdown and quarantine. This was a very uncomfortable topic to discuss. We have to confront the possibility that one or all of us may be either exposed to the virus and thus required to quarantine ourselves for two weeks or, God forbid, that we were to come down with the virus. Anyone who has been exposed or infected with the virus is definitely my primary concern, but it would also affect parish life.

If I am forced to quarantine or worse, it would disrupt especially the Mass schedule. The diocese would decide whether or not they can send a priest for Mass, and it may not be possible because most of the priests available for help are retired and vulnerable to the Covid-19. If Mr. Ward were to likewise face a similar situation, it would mean that he could not be on site to deal with the various problems that come up during the day. And the same can be said for our teaching staff, maintenance personnel and office staff. I hope and pray that this doesn't happen for our staff, but also for you. We can't serve you if we are personally dealing with this virus.

I want to thank you for going online or calling the parish to register for Sunday Mass. We are able to put you on as a regular attendee of a Mass so you would not have to register each week. However, we do ask if you are coming to a different Mass or going elsewhere, please call the office to have you taken off the list for that weekend. This will ensure others to come and join in the celebration of the Eucharist. When you come to Mass please wear your mask throughout the service and make sure your mask covers your nose and mouth.

I will be taking a few days off to visit family thus the reason for not having Mass last Monday and the coming Monday. I had planned to be leading a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but unfortunately, the Covid-19 virus forced us to reschedule and make other plans. I will be around when needed. Peace, Fr. Tom