

Dear Parishioners,

I want to address a few issues, but first I want to welcome all those who are returning to Mass after a long absence. We are glad you are here! Please help us get the word out that we can come to Mass safely and all are welcome. We will continue to register everyone who comes to the Mass. We don't want to turn people away and you can help. Please register online by noon on Friday or call the parish office. If you are going to be away for a weekend and are preregistered, I encourage you to call and let us know. This will enable us to make room for others. Will we be able to allow more than the 25% of the church's capacity? That will be up to the bishop, but we can do our part by getting vaccinated, wearing a mask and keeping socially distant.

### **Vaccine Controversy**

There has been quite a bit of controversy surrounding the recently approved vaccine by some bishops. At this writing, I don't know if more bishops will comment on this vaccine or not. At the core of the controversy is what went into this vaccine. It was made with cells from aborted babies. The bishops who oppose receiving this vaccine argue that in so doing, we are saying that abortion is alright, when in reality, **it is not**. The bishops of Michigan put out a statement last month stating that it was fine to receive the first two vaccines. They argued that since we are not directly involved in the killing of innocent babies, we can receive the vaccine. This is a complicated issue especially for all Catholics as we grapple with the question: Is it moral to be vaccinated? Until we hear otherwise from our bishop, I will encourage everyone to get vaccinated based on the fact that we were not directly involved in the abortions. For updates and to read the official statement please visit the diocesan website at [grdiocese.org](http://grdiocese.org).

On a related note, the Health Department is opening up more people to get vaccinated who are over 65 years of age. It is my understanding that you will need to register online. If you have any questions, you can call the Health Dept.

### **Pope in Iraq**

Pope Francis made a historic trip to Iraq last weekend. I'm sure there were more than a few worried people regarding this trip, however the Holy Father was determined to make this trip. Why did he go? Pope Francis is a pastor who cares for all of his flock. He went to that war-torn country first, to assure the Catholic community of his prayers and support and to let them know they are not on their own. This community has suffered greatly over the centuries, but especially in recent years. They have been persecuted and their homes and possessions confiscated. Those who could, have already fled to find a peaceful life. These are Christian Communities that date their roots over 2,000 years. Pope Francis is letting them know that he is willing to make this difficult trip because he cares about them and supports them in trying to rebuild.

The other reason for going was to meet with Muslim officials to discuss ways in which both communities can live in peace. The results of their meetings will not be known for many years, but it is a beginning! Let's hope and pray that the Holy Father's work is successful.

## Becoming Whole

Recently, one of our younger parishioners noticed that at times during Mass, the large host that I raise after the consecration was half and not whole and wanted to know why. Was it because the parish couldn't afford a whole host? Although I am cheap, that was not the reason. I explained that the half of the large host was a reminder to me of all the people who aren't able to be at Mass at this time. As a community, we are not whole because of this pandemic. I am very much aware of the fact that many of our own parishioners are fearful of being in large crowds. I am mindful that we cannot bury our loved ones in a manner that we once had. I am mindful that we cannot gather for meetings or social activities. So much of parish life has been put on hold and there's nothing we can do about it- at least at this time. Our goal is to open up the Masses once again for everyone and to get parish life where it needs to be, but in the meantime, it is important to realize that we are not there yet. I ask you to pray for those who are unable to join us at Mass and to pray that we will once more open up and share life as fully as possible.

I must apologize to all those who have felt abandoned by the parish. I know that there are people who feel like the parish hasn't cared for them over the year- to those, I deeply apologize. This has been a year of experimenting with technology- sometimes very successful, other times, not so well. I want to assure you; you were not left alone. You were and remain in my prayers and thoughts. We await the day when we can be together, but in the meantime, let us pray for one another and know that we make up this parish community of St. Michael's.

And during this year, the bishop has told the priests not to visit homes or public places. We were unable to visit parishioners in hospitals and nursing homes. The reason for this was to keep his priests from getting the virus. There have been at least four priests who have been infected with the virus and still more who were forced to quarantine and the diocese had no priests to send for the weekend. Now that I have gotten the vaccine, I feel more comfortable getting out and visiting the parish. If you want me to stop in for a visit, please call the parish office to arrange a time for me to come to your home.

## Easter Schedule

We are in the process of making Holy Week plans. The Palm Sunday Mass schedule will remain the same. Holy Thursday Mass of the Last Supper will be at 7:00 p.m. with Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament until 11:00 p.m. Good Friday Stations of the Cross will be at Noon with the Good Friday Service at 1:00 p.m. The Easter Vigil will take place at 8:45 p.m. and Easter Sunday Masses are at 9:00 & 11:00 a.m.

This year we are asking **everyone** to register for the Easter Masses. The reason for this is that Easter is a time for families to gather and for families to return from Spring break. If you know what Mass you are planning to attend on Easter, we ask that you either register online or call the parish office. The weekends of March 21 and March 28 there will be Easter Mass sign-up sheets available at the registrar's table as you enter Church. Registering in advance will help us get an accurate count knowing that we will have many visitors and guests joining us for the Masses. Your help will be greatly appreciated.

If you haven't gotten vaccinated yet, please do so when your turn comes. Please wear a mask.  
We don't need to let our guards down because we can see a light at the end of this deadly tunnel.  
Peace, Fr. Tom