

Dear Parishioners,

I know that there are many rumors regarding my health and I would like to spend a few moments addressing them.

On October 22, I was at a parish meeting only to learn several days later that one of the participants was diagnosed as COVID positive. Immediately my name and phone number were given to the health department as a potential exposure sight. During that meeting all the participants, myself included, were seated 6 feet from each other with masks on and at no time in direct contact with the person for more than 15 minutes. This was all in line with Health Department regulations.

I have not had symptoms of the virus following the meeting to the present, but I have taken several precautions. I cancelled all face to face meetings for the week and have moved my office to the rectory. As long as I remain symptom free, I will continue to celebrate Mass. I will wear a mask throughout the whole Mass and will ask a Eucharistic Minister to distribute Holy Communion in my absence. I also plan to have as little contact with the hosts as possible.

Some wondered if I might have infected you through the distribution of the Eucharist. I don't think so for several reasons:

1. I consistently sanitized my hands several times before you receive the Eucharist.
2. I wear a face mask when distributing the Eucharist.
3. My contact with you is less than 15 minutes.

All of which are required by the CDC (Center of Disease Control) and the Health Department. If you feel uncomfortable being at Mass, I would certainly understand. The bishop has given you a dispensation to stay home, watch the Mass on TV and monitor your own symptoms.

If I should come down with the virus, I will follow the directions of the Health Department and my own doctor. If that happens and I am quarantined, I will try to get the information out as quickly as possible by using our parish app, texts, e-mails and the phone. I will also contact the diocese to see if there is a priest available to celebrate Mass on the weekend, if not, I have contacted Fr. Michael at Big Rapids who will consecrate extra hosts for us. This will allow for a Communion service- in my absence-for those whom we were unable to contact or still want to come to receive the Body of Christ.

There is a possibility that any one of us will get the virus. The Big Rapids paper has reported that there have been **over 300 COVID related cases** since October. I would encourage everyone to follow the guidelines of the Health Department such as washing of hands, wearing a mask and keeping socially distant. Right now, these are the only tools we have to defeat this virus.

I have **not** been tested for the virus as of yet. I am still waiting to hear from the Health Department and as of now I don't appear to have the COVID related symptoms. But again, I will do whatever is asked of me.

So, this past week, I have laid low and worked out of the rectory. On those few times, I was in public, I wore a mask. I am trying to do all that is asked of me so as to keep you from getting the virus from me.

I want to refresh your memory on the symptoms of the virus which are: fever or chills, cough, fatigue, shortness of breath, muscle aches, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, and recent loss of taste or smell.

Finally, I ask that we continue to pray for all those infected with this terrible virus. We have several parishioners who have either recovered or are down with the virus. I ask that you watch the bulletin, when we can, we will be offering Mass for those who have the virus. If you can, please join us or pray a rosary for all those infected on that day. This is one of the ways that we as a community can support our infected brothers and sisters.

I want to thank LaVina Dise and Pat Defever for organizing and leading the Remembrance Services last Sunday. As I gaze on the banners in Church which lists the names of those who died this year, I was amazed at how many of our fellow parishioners have passed on to eternal life. All of them belonged to a family and are loved and missed. Let's remember them and say a prayer for them. Grant eternal rest to all of our beloved dead. May their souls and all the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace. Amen!

We are beginning to plan for Christmas and to help us, I am asking for your input. Christmas falls on Friday this year. Given the fact that the COVID virus will still be with us, will you be travelling this year to family or will family be travelling to see you? Are you planning to cancel family gatherings during the season? We will be taking a survey in the bulletin in weeks to come, please give it some thought and I hope you respond.

Take care and stay well. Peace, Fr. Tom