

Dear St. Mary's Parishioners,

No doubt you have read about Bishop Kettler's directive to **suspend all public weekend and weekday Masses through Friday, May 15**. I feel like "a duck out of water" as ministry is always about gathering, community, and sharing. But the health and lives of many people are at stake.

While the threat in our community may not be readily visible, it is very real. The Bishop has responsibility for the welfare of his people. The Bishop is following the CDC's protocol. As he related, he has not experienced *anything* like this in his 50 years of priesthood.

I encourage you to go on *YouTube* and type in "*How Should Catholics Respond to the Coronavirus Pandemic?*" by Fr. Mike Schmitz. I really appreciated his words. We ARE in this TOGETHER.

**I encourage you to visit us frequently on our parish website. It is a major communication tool. It is:** [www.stmaryalexandria.org](http://www.stmaryalexandria.org) On this site Mass (both daily and Sunday) will be posted each week. We will be posting "hosting church at home" ideas. Schedule a time when you all gather in front of the TV or the computer to participate in the Mass. Sign up for our email blasts by registering at [stmaryalexandria.org](http://stmaryalexandria.org) (the sign up is right on our home page), or sending us an email at [stmary@stmaryalexandria.org](mailto:stmary@stmaryalexandria.org)

## **What does Bishop Kettler's suspension of public gatherings mean for us here in Alexandria?**

### **MASS AND OTHER LITURGIES AT THE CHURCH**

**No public Liturgies at St. Mary's will be celebrated until after May 15.** Gatherings of over ten people are prohibited. Even then, people must remain at a distance of six feet from one another. We are posting Mass for every Sunday. Plan to gather your household and pray together, knowing that others from St. Mary's are doing the same. You will find this on our website [www.stmaryalexandria.org](http://www.stmaryalexandria.org) along with prayers to be said within your household during this time of confinement. We are in this together.

### **EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION**

**The Blessed Sacrament Chapel will remain closed, and Eucharistic Adoration will be suspended through May 15.**

### **BAPTISMS**

All baptisms scheduled before May 15 must be rescheduled.

### **WEDDINGS**

While we have no weddings scheduled during this time, there is a possibility that the social distancing as a means of containment will continue. If that is the case, the bishop must give permission for any wedding to take place.

### **FUNERALS**

Death does not wait for a virus to subside. Funeral Masses during this time are *not* permitted. Clergy are not to participate in parish prayers. Only graveside services are allowed. A memorial Mass should be scheduled as soon as possible after May 15.

### **ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

There are to be no communal celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick. Arrangements can be made on an individual basis for those in danger of imminent death.

### **PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK AND THE DYING**

It is a privilege to serve the sick and dying members of a community. The pastor will do what he can to serve them. Be mindful that circumstances may prevent him from doing so. Prayer resources will be available on our website ([www.stmaryalexandria.org](http://www.stmaryalexandria.org)) for use with the sick in your home.

### **RECONCILIATION**

We have determined that no celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation will occur until the social distancing protocol is lifted. Father Steve has a compromised immune system. One can visit with him on the phone. In the event of not being able to go to confession, follow this age-old teaching: make a heart-felt act of contrition because God's mercy is everlasting and endless. At the next available opportunity, you can receive absolution of what you have already confessed with all sincerity of heart, knowing that you have been forgiven.

### **Pope Francis on Confession when a priest is not available**

(From Pope Francis' homily Friday, March 20)

The habit of *returning home (to the Father)* “takes flesh in the Sacrament of Reconciliation”, the Pope explained:

*“I know that many of you go to confession before Easter... Many will say to me: ‘But Father... I can't leave the house and I want to make my peace with the Lord. I want Him to embrace me... How can I do that unless I find a priest?’. Do what the catechism says. It's very clear. If you don't find a priest to go to confession, **speak to God. He's your Father. Tell Him the truth: ‘Lord, I did this and this and this. Pardon me.’ Ask His forgiveness with all your heart with an act of contrition, and promise Him, ‘afterward I will go to confession.’** You will return to God's grace immediately. You yourself can draw near, as the catechism teaches us, to God's forgiveness, without having a priest at hand.”*

At the end of his homily, the Pope expressed the hope that the word “return” might “*echo in our ears today.*”

*“Return to your Daddy. Return to your Father.  
He's waiting for you, and He will throw a feast for you.”*

**FIRST HOLY COMMUNION**

The celebration of the first reception of Holy Communion by our 2<sup>nd</sup> graders will have to be rescheduled.

**CONFIRMATION ON APRIL 29**

Confirmation of our 11<sup>th</sup> graders has been postponed and will be rescheduled at a later time.

**RCIA**

All meetings as well as the retreat are cancelled. Initiation of our catechumen and of our candidate will take place at a future date.