

CHRISTMAS LITURGY SCHEDULE

Reserve your seat by December 15!

Christmas Eve
2:30 PM • 4:00 PM • 5:30 PM
Christmas Day
8:00 AM • 10:00 AM

RESERVATIONS WILL BE REQUIRED



Go to stmaryalexandria.org to reserve seats for Christmas Mass.
Or call the Parish Office at 763-5781 to make reservations.

A reserved seat is necessary to ensure maximum safety for all who attend.

420 Irving Street
Alexandria, MN 56308



STEWARDSHIP Our Way of Life



The Church of St. Mary



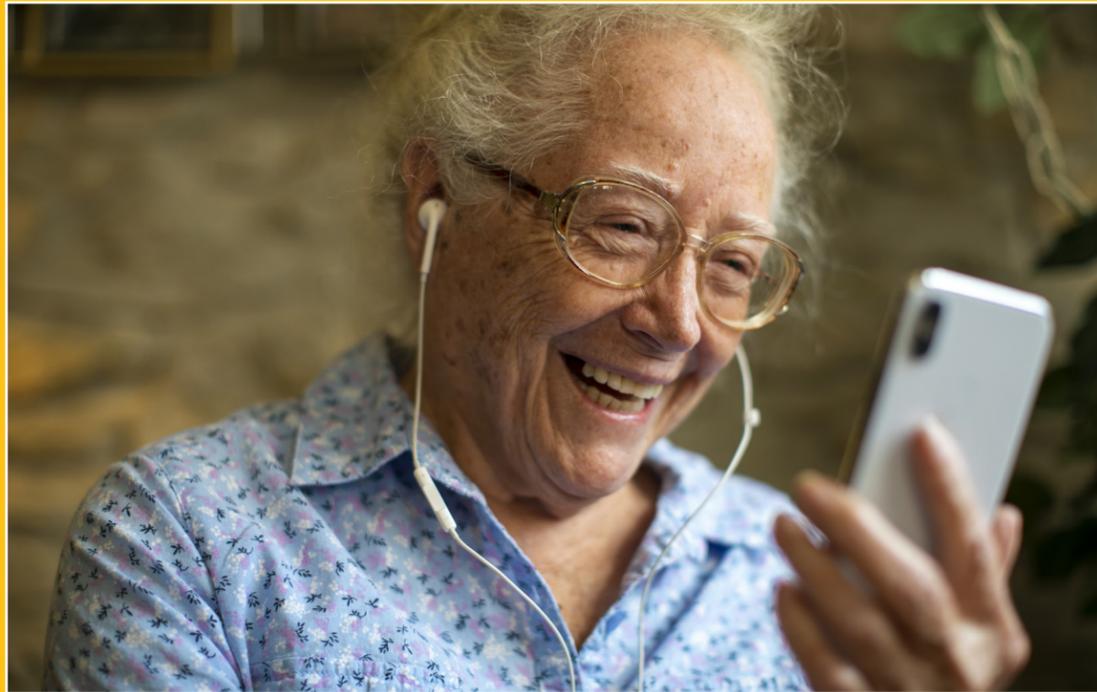
PARISH LIFE
CONNECTIONS
DURING COVID-19

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COVID CONNECTIONS

by Kathy Fischer, Parish Nurse



March 27th started the beginning of a ministry that hoped to decrease isolation and disconnection among members of our parish due to COVID-19 precautions. A **Telephone Check-In Ministry** started with a multifaceted approach. All parishioners over 75 years of age were called with the goal to help, share prayer and prayer resources, and to be a human touch in uncertain times. A total of 402 parishioners were called on a weekly basis by 49 volunteers. Volunteer callers were available to run errands such as; buying groceries, picking up medical supplies, and dropping mail at the post office, just to name a few.

This ministry continues now, 8 months later. Some parishioners now request sporadic calls, others do weekly check-ins, still others do not require calls but know their volunteer caller is still available if needed.

Comments by callers and those called speak to the need for the human connection so essential during this pandemic. Our church family hasn't always been able to meet in person, but new ways to connect, develop, and strengthen relationships have been created within our church family.

A volunteer caller summed up the ministry: "These people are lonely and scared, and so very thankful. They have shared snapshots of their lives, children, husbands, births, death, and day-to-day struggles. In very unusual times in our world, it has been a pleasure to check in on these lovely people, spread some joy, pray with them, and just have someone to talk with. Heaven knows they have given me great joy as well."

ADVENT CONFESSION SCHEDULE

Thursday, December 17 at 6:15 PM

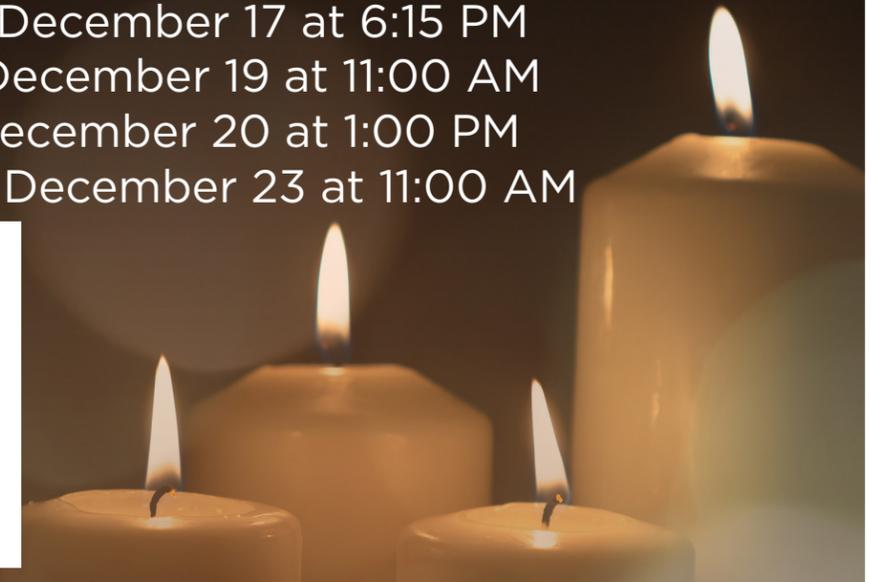
Saturday, December 19 at 11:00 AM

Sunday, December 20 at 1:00 PM

Wednesday, December 23 at 11:00 AM

A recorded Penance Service will be available December 6. Find it on:

- OUR WEBSITE
- EMAIL BLAST
- FACEBOOK
- OUR VIMEO SITE



INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTENDING INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION:

- Masks and social distancing required
- Stay in designated line while waiting for confessor
- Exit church after confession
- Keep confessions brief in order to reduce exposure for confessors

YOU ARE MISSED!

We all miss seeing a full church. St. Mary's welcomes all who feel comfortable attending Mass during this pandemic. To ensure everyone's safety, we are practicing social distancing, mask wearing and sanitizing.

However, if you feel safer watching Mass at home, Bishop Kettler has issued a dispensation from Mass until further notice. Please watch, pray and sing along as part of our at-home community.

ONLINE MASS LINKS:

WEBSITE:	Go to stmaryalexandria.org and click on "Recorded Masses."
EMAIL BLASTS:	Sign up to receive our weekly email blasts (stmaryalexandria.org or call the Parish Office) which includes Mass.
FACEBOOK:	Go to facebook.com/stmaryalexandria - follow us and like us!
VIMEO:	Go directly to our vimeo site at vimeo.com/user110110050 .

A NOTE FROM OUR PASTOR

We are still living with COVID-19. I have to say, I miss the large Sunday gatherings for Mass, the singing, the servers, the kids, the elderly, coffee and rolls, parish socials and more. What we are experiencing is *so contrary* to what *being church* is all about—coming together as sisters and brothers in Christ's name to give praise and thanks to God for God's many gifts.

We have been back "*in person*" for weekend Mass for almost five months; daily Mass for six months. Our health and safety protocols have allowed continued sacramental celebrations, and weekday and weekend Masses. Some of you have had or still have concerns about attending in person due to underlying health conditions. Please know that we have taken all recommended and required precautions to ensure "a safe as possible" environment. That being said, we welcome all, but encourage you to *make your own decision* to attend Mass based on *your* comfort level.

As we approach the major holidays and seasons of the Church Year—Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas Season, we know that **how we celebrate Mass will be different**. There is no way for us to accommodate the number of people we *normally* have at Christmas. With the number of COVID-19 infections rising, safe-distancing and the limiting of numbers, larger gatherings are not possible.

At the time of this writing, we have five Christmas Masses scheduled: December 24 at 2:30 PM, 4:00 PM and 5:30 PM and December 25 at 8:00 AM and 10:00 AM. **Seating will be done by reservations only**. Directions on making reservations can be found on the last page of this newsletter. Submit a reservation for *each person* from your household who *will be* in attendance by December 15 and an email will be sent to you. *Make a copy of that email for each person/family to present at the door*. We will not be able to accommodate walk-ups, sorry to say. If you are not a computer person, you can call the office *during office hours* (do *not* leave messages) and Janell will make the reservation and send you the reservation copy. If a Mass is full, it will be closed to additional worshippers. We also need a full complement of ministers for each Mass—hospitality, screeners, and communion ministers. Please call and sign up; we need your help. We will continue to record Mass for every Sunday and Christmas and New Year's Day. If you will not be attending Mass at St. Mary's, please make plans to watch the Mass at home as a family.

I encourage you to think about how you and your family can still celebrate these major feasts with the limitations that are placed upon us by the presence of the virus. **Be deliberate about what and how you celebrate**. It may feel very odd at first. Plan to do rituals in your home. We are providing some in this newsletter for you. Feel free to duplicate them for use on any of the given days. You can also find them -and more- on our parish website.

With gratitude for you and the people of this parish,

Fr. Steven M. Binsfeld



ADVENT RESOURCES

Advent Resources are available on our website. Go to stmaryalexandria.org, and click on "Advent Resources." We will continue to add ideas, prayers, PDFs and links to help you and your family prepare for the birth of Christ.



CHRISTMAS MASS INFORMATION

Reservations will be required.

Information about Christmas Mass is located on the last page of this newsletter. Don't miss it!

stmaryalexandria.org

A FEW THOUGHTS FROM SOME OF OUR VOLUNTEER CALLERS:

“ I called my list of parishioners weekly, and a couple of times when I missed a call or contact, they called me to check on me!
- Char ”

“ One contact, at the first call, cried and cried as we prayed together. She was overcome with relief and gratitude that she was not alone in the uncertain times; her parish family cares about her. Since then I have been able to run errands for her too.
-Mary ”

“ We have been picking up groceries for a couple in our parish. As I became busier at work, my husband started doing most of the shopping. He loves doing it for them and enjoys visiting with them each week. This opportunity, what a strange word to use these days, but yes, opportunity, to form new relationships within our Catholic community has brought many graces for us and our couple too.
- Reid and Sonya ”

“ One man I called is an avid gardener. He shared secrets of gardening and how to keep chipmunks from destroying a garden!
- Bonnie ”

“ Where do I begin...little did I know that back in March, agreeing to check in on our senior community meant that I would make so many friends! Simple calls to the people on my list have turned into phone friendships. After months of "staying in touch", one couple called me early in the morning with a bit of urgency in their voice. They shared that their son, in his 50's, had died during the night and they wanted to know what to do regarding a funeral at St. Mary's. I was able to put them in touch with the parish office and get their questions answered. I was honored to be a hospitality minister at their son's funeral.
-Mary ”

“ One woman I called was my daughter's Girl Scout leader. We hadn't talked for many years; we had many memories to share.
-Bonnie ”

“ I have also been mailing cards and notes to my contacts. The phone calls have led to me bringing weekly Holy Communion to one of my contacts.
-Ann ”



YOUNG ADULTS CONNECTING

by Tammy Huss, Coordinator of Youth Ministries

I would like to introduce you to our Young Adult group! This group was started last year by Board of Ed member, Jen Klecker, with support from the Faith Formation Office. Advertising was done through the bulletin and at the tech school. It netted about 6-8 students with plans to meet monthly for Mass, a meal, and fellowship. They only met 3-4 times before COVID hit.

Fast forward to summer 2020. One of those young adults reached out to encourage us to restart this group and it has flourished!

A handful of young adults went about evangelizing and the group has grown to over 20 members who gather weekly at the church to make plans, share what's going on in their lives, pray together, grow in their faith, and build their community. Jen and I continue to join them monthly to catch up and meet new members.

They also meet individually for activities, including men's and women's bible studies, ladies' night, and most recently pumpkin carving and a Halloween

celebration. On a whim they will send out a group text to meet for service, prayer, or just to get together. They have surprised each other with birthday dinners and cheesecake parties. When one was injured recently in an activity, they stepped up to put together a get-well basket.

This group has become a family for those who are away from home. It is beautiful to witness the faith in these young people! They have stepped up to serve in various ways, attend Mass regularly, and are there for each other. I am blessed to be their liaison to the church and to witness the growth of this group.

Amidst these trying times, with our world and country having become so divisive, I offer you hope, and challenge you to be like these young adults - inclusive, non-judgmental, welcoming, loving, family, Christ-filled.

For those who are young adults yourself and would like to join this group, please contact the Faith Formation office and we will get you connected! Call 320-763-9202.

PRAYER

God of the Good News, the promise of your joy draws us to the manger. As we approach Jesus' birth, let us kneel and adore him. Let us bow down before the mystery of Emmanuel – God with us. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT: Responding with Love

SCRIPTURE: Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

LITANY:

Leader: Our response is "**O God, we sing your praise.**"

Few will sing your praises forever, O God, for your constant love shown to your people! **R**

Leader: For the wonders you have done among us, we shout your name all day long. **R**

Leader: We sing about the abundant grace of your mercy shown to all generations! **R**

Leader: Our souls magnify you for the promise of joy and new life! **R**

Leader: We joyfully sing your praise for that gift of Love that came down to earth on Christmas. **R**

Light all four Advent Candles

PRAYER

God of the ages, like Mary, may our souls reflect your greatness and our spirits rejoice in you, for you have looked with favor on us and done marvelous things. May our lives be a response to the love you have shown us in Jesus, born of Mary, who lives forever and ever. Amen.

THE FEAST OF CHRISTMAS

Light all four Advent Candles, not the Christmas candle at this time.

SCRIPTURE: The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I am bringing you good news of the great joy for all the people: today in the city of David is born a Savior, who is the Christ, the Lord."

LITANY:

Leader: Our response is "**Sing a new song to the Lord.**"

Let the whole earth sing to the Lord! We shall sing to God a new song! **R**

Leader: We remember the Lord's salvation every day! We sing of God's peace to all the earth! **R**

Leader: We declare the Lord's marvelous works to all the world! We rejoice at the coming of the Lord! **R**

Leader: Let us lift up the name of the Lord! We celebrate the fulfillment of the promise! **R**

Leader: Let us receive the Lord's goodness! We sing a song of Joy! **R**

Light the Christmas candle at this time

PRAYER

Loving Creator, we give thanks for the birth of joy in our lives at Christmas. Send us forth as messengers of this Good News of great joy for all the people we meet and for all the people around the globe. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Sing verse 1 of "Silent Night" or another Christmas carol if you would like to do so.

Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child
Holy Infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace



PRAYERS FOR LIGHTING ADVENT CANDLES

You can make a simple wreath around which you can place 4 purple candles with a white or gold Christmas candle in the center...or just assemble the 5 candles. At some point, before a meal you can do this ritual alone or with your family. You can use the entire prayer or just the final prayer at every meal.

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT: Waiting for Hope

SCRIPTURE: "Stay awake, for you do not know the day or the hour when your Lord will appear."

LITANY:

Leader: Our response is "**O God, we place our hope in you.**"
God of our mothers and fathers. **R**

Leader: Give life to people who are weary; fill us with hope in you. **R**

Leader: Healer of souls, renew our joy in you. Turn to us again, O God of Hosts. **R**

Leader: Make your dwelling among us, Giver of Life; Hear our cries; we call out to you in hope. **R**

Leader: We anxiously hope for the joy you alone can bring us. **R**

Light the first Advent Candle

PRAYER

God of light, as we wait through the long winter nights for the birth of Christ, help us to keep watch. Help us to tend the tiny flame of hope. Make us alert until your gift of joy arrives. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT: Preparing for Peace

SCRIPTURE: "A voice cries out in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

LITANY:

Leader: Our response is "**O God, give us your peace.**"

We speak our hope in whispers; restore us again, O God of our salvation. **R**

Leader: In anticipation we prepare for your coming; Breathe life into us once again, that we may rejoice in you. **R**

Leader: Amidst rising hopes we turn to you, O God; Show us your steadfast love. **R**

Leader: Lord, let us hear your words to us in our time and place; Speak peace to your people. **R**

Leader: Faithful God, prepare our hearts to receive your joy; may peace and justice kiss in our time. **R**

Light the first and second Advent Candles

PRAYER

Faithful God, help us prepare our heart and home for the birth of the Savior. Show us how to make the path of our lives and our world peace-filled, so that we can joyfully receive the Messiah. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT: The Promise of Joy

SCRIPTURE: "I will rejoice in the Lord greatly; my whole being shall exalt in my God; for he has clothed me with the garment of salvation."

LITANY:

Leader: Our response is "**O God, give us joy.**"

Lord, through your prophets you have promised us your joy. You have declared good news to those who are oppressed. **R**

Leader: We continue to place our hope in your promise, O God, to bind you to our broken hearts. **R**

Leader: We depend upon your promises, Giver of Joy; your promise of freedom to all captives. **R**

Leader: Lord, we wear our baptismal garment; help us to know that our only garment is you. **R**

Leader: We take comfort in your promises to us and await you with joyful and expectant hearts. **R**

Light the first, second and third Advent Candles

PLANNING AND CONDUCTING SCHOOL DURING A PANDEMIC

by Troy Sladek, St. Mary's School Principal



After working through the Stay at Home Order and distance learning experience last Spring, it has always been the goal and consistent message to our families that St. Mary's School was going to do everything possible to offer in-person learning this Fall.

In order to do this, a Reopening Task Force was formed, and included three local medical professionals from Alomere and Sanford. Their expertise and experience with COVID and COVID-related protocols have been a huge asset to our entire school community. They provided training for staff, advised on a safe school set-up and helped advise on quarantine, isolation and learning model decisions. Their partnership has given my entire staff the confidence that we can safely teach students while IN school and, if we follow the protocols in place, we can do it without being fearful.

All the new safety protocols have school looking quite different from past years; however, without them, we wouldn't have been able to open in the Fall and they are allowing us to stay open even when community COVID case numbers have been increasing.

Some of the protocols include:

- Students use all three entry and exit doors
- Volunteers are not allowed into the building
- Classes learn, eat and play with only their grade level cohort
- Students eat in the cafeteria, gym, and outside
- Lunch and recess times are staggered
- All nonessential furniture in classrooms has been removed so desks could be spread out
- Students who are at home in quarantine are still able to participate in live classroom instruction
- Students and staff wear masks
- Music classes take place in the Great Hall
- Daily health screenings are required
- Assigned seating is required and documented in all classes, lunch, and Mass
- Virtual parent teacher conferences

Even though school looks much different, we are all very blessed to be part of a loving and nurturing Catholic Christian environment where school doesn't FEEL different. Our school is once again filled with energy, excitement and love. Behind every mask is a child, teacher and parent smiling that we are in school and not at home learning behind a computer screen.

The staff at St. Mary's School have proven they are up to any challenge and are more than capable of making the very best out of any adversity. Our school families have experienced this first-hand and have shared it with many in our community as well. School enrollment is up by 27 students from last year and we look to continue growing in the years to come.



HOT CORNER

by L.J. Youngers, Director of Music and Liturgy



May I be honest for a moment? There has been a lot of change since March 17, 2020. I find myself tired, irritable, and angry – a lot of times for no good reason. I am sick of divisiveness, sick of COVID-19, sick of rudeness. Do you feel the same way? The good news – I’m surrounded by a lot of wonderful people who continually remind me of how blessed I am.

I’m sure you’re wondering where I’m going with this. If I have all these feelings about all the changes at church, work and home – I’m sure you’re feeling the same way. So, maybe we can help each other out!

THIS IS H.O.T.!

- Honest** – please be honest (kindly and politely) – a lot of roles at church have changed hands. It’s hard to be the “new kid on the block.” Please, please, please – let us speak to each other with kindness, love and respect. We are a team. We are accountable to each other.
- Open** – if you have ideas and thoughts about the changes – keep it positive and helpful. I don’t know of anyone who appreciates more problems than solutions. We are always happy to hear your ideas...if we don’t use them, don’t be offended. Even great ideas take awhile!
- Two-Way** – all communication is two-way. If we send an email, please respond. If we leave a message, please respond. If the answer is “no,” we are okay with that. We just need to know! If we are communicating with you in a way that doesn’t work for you – **let us know! Let us know! Let us know! Let us know!** (not snow 😊)

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

—George Bernard Shaw

GRATEFUL FOR GOD’S BLESSINGS

by Todd Wentworth, St. Mary’s Business Administrator

This past summer, Amy, the girls, and I headed up to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area for a week-long vacation. We were thankful to be immersed in God’s magical creation of towering green pines and crystal clean water. Recognizing that God blessed us with such an amazing week, we tried to do our part in giving thanks in prayer, by packing out all of our garbage, washing our dishes away from the clean lake and leaving behind minimal trace of us being there. As Christian disciples we are expected to live a life of stewardship.

The Diocese of Wichita, Kansas defines stewardship as, “*the grateful response of a Christian disciple who recognizes and receives God’s gifts and shares these gifts in love of God and neighbor.*” Haven’t we all seen this in action the past few months with the fall harvest? Farmers, blessed with knowledge, equipment and land have worked in preparing the soil, planting, praying for rain then for dry weather, then harvesting the fruits of their labor.

As parishioners, how are each of us called to be stewards of God’s blessings? As Christian disciples, we are to follow Christ’s lead. Jesus gave his whole self as he died on the cross for us. **St. Mother Teresa asks us, “If God, who owes nothing to us, is ready to impart to us no less than Himself, shall we answer with just a fraction of ourselves?”**

During November, we celebrate Thanksgiving and the first Sunday of Advent. It is a good time to reflect on how we are living as Jesus’ disciples. Upon reflection and prayer, hopefully we are inspired to do more, but we may not know what to do. Here are just a few points to ponder in serving our parish community. May they spur even more ideas that fit our specific God given blessings.

1. Pray. We can all do this whether on the deer stand or a dedicated time at Adoration. The church is open for private prayer from 7:00 AM till 8:00 PM every weeknight.
2. Call the Parish Office. Let us know what you are passionate about and we would be happy to help identify some options to share your time and talents.
3. Invite others. Ask someone to join you in attending a committee meeting, serving as an usher/hospitality, or coming to Mass. It is so wonderful to see people being community together.



4. Commit financially. Money doesn’t grow on trees and it is a reality of the world we live in.

a. Online giving is very convenient and safe. See “GIVE” on our website for details or call me at the parish office and I will walk through it with you.

b. Leave a legacy. Remember to identify in your will, **The Church of St. Mary, St. Mary’s of Alexandria Catholic Foundation,** or **St. Mary’s School Trust Fund.**

We all bring unique and special gifts that, when shared with each other in abundance, create a warm, welcoming place where people feel a sense of responsibility and belonging to our Catholic faith community.

May you and your family be blessed with a safe, healthy, and abundantly grateful Thanksgiving and Christmas! God bless all of you and I look forward to seeing you on campus.