
A LETTER FROM YOUR PRIESTS

March 12, 2020

Our Dear Friends and Fellow Bellingham Parishioners,

We have never felt more love, care, and concern for you than we do at this very moment.

Yesterday we watched a video message from our Archbishop telling us to suspend the public celebration of Mass for the foreseeable future. We unreservedly agree with his decision and believe it was the right thing to do, but this does not change how deeply saddened we are by the reality, and how saddened we are for our Catholic community here in Bellingham and the entire Archdiocese. The Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and summit of everything we do as Catholics. We never thought we would live to see the day where we would have to suspend its public celebration, and we pray that this is the only time in our lifetimes that we will ever need to do so.

Nevertheless, it remains the right decision. The COVID-19 virus is particularly dangerous to the elderly and infirm, and one of the great clarion calls of Scripture is that we must care first for the weakest among us. Even though we can never live without the Eucharist, and we never will, a temporary suspension of the Mass, and all public gatherings, will help slow the spread of the virus significantly enough that our fellow parishioners will remain safe and our healthcare system will be able to keep up with an ever-changing situation.

One of the most important names for the Eucharist is *sacramentum caritatis* (sacrament of charity), because it, more than all other sacraments, drives us to love one another. There is no contradiction between our love for the Eucharist and our love for our neighbors: not now, not ever. Yes, today, because of exceptional circumstances, we must live without reception of the Eucharist for a time, but this is without question *an expression of the charity that comes from the Sacrament*, and not in any way a contradiction to it.

We want to be clear: **the intention of this suspension of the Mass is so that you will limit your exposure to strangers.** To that end, our parishes, following the directives and recommendations from the Archdiocese of Seattle, will be doing the following until further notice:

1. **Suspending all public celebrations of the Mass.** Funerals will be celebrated when necessary but limited to immediate family and close friends.
2. **Closing the parish office.** Voicemails and e-mails will be answered, but no visitors will be received without prior appointment.
3. **Canceling all meetings on campus,** with the exception of direct aid to the poor, which will be left to the discretion of the members of each ministry.

You will find additional policies and programs specific to each parish at the end of this letter, as well as recommendations for how to pray and live out our faith when we are quarantined at home.

We will, however, continue to care for the dying. No one should die without the grace of the sacraments and the comfort of prayer, and care for the dying is an essential aspect of our sacred ministry. However, we would ask that you only ask for a priest when death is a true possibility. Otherwise, extraneous visits to the sick and homebound actually put them more at risk, and we have been asked to severely limit these visits.

These may seem like extreme measures, born out of panic and overreaction, but nothing could be further from the truth. Responding to a pandemic is a matter of statistics: limiting exposure decreases the odds of contraction. The more we can limit exposure, the better the odds. For the sake of our parishioners (especially our most vulnerable parishioners) and the greater community, we are taking significant steps now so that we do not face an elevated crisis in the future. This is a process well understood by healthcare professionals, and we are merely following the process.

Dear friends, we are not panicked. St. Paul's words to the Romans remain as true today as ever:

"What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35,37-39)

Jesus freed us from the power of sin and death by his victory on the cross. Even the grave has no power to hold those of us who have united ourselves to the Resurrection of Jesus. In all of this, we will remain faithful to the Lord, because he is our help, our hope, and our sure support.

Finally, in addition to our prayers for all the sick and those who take care of them, we would ask you to join us in using this time to pray for an increased love of the Mass and the Eucharist here in Bellingham and the entire Archdiocese. Losing the Mass is such a shock to the system, because we never thought we would have to do without it. May we never take it for granted again.

In Jesus who is our strength,



Sacred Heart, Bellingham



Assumption, Bellingham

WAYS TO LIVE OUR FAITH

It is important to continue to live our faith, especially when prayer is so urgently required by the current crisis. Please find below some suggestions from your priests and parish staff members.

Stay Connected to the Mass

In addition to online Masses, we recommend reading the daily readings and making an act of spiritual communion, especially on Sunday.

The daily readings can be found at <https://uscgb.org/bible/readings>

Bishop Mueggenborg suggested this prayer for an act of spiritual communion:

“My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most holy Eucharist.

I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally,

come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace you as if you were already there and unite myself wholly to you.

Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

Pray Devotions

The **Rosary** and the **Angelus** are two very common and storied devotions in our faith. Deacon Larry Kheriaty would like to invite everyone in Bellingham to join him in praying the Rosary and the Angelus in their homes. He will be praying the Rosary at 7:00 a.m. and the Angelus at noon each day.

Serve the Marginalized

Some suggestions from the Archdiocese:

- Expand outreach by making phone calls to homebound neighbors and local nursing home residents to accompany them in spirit.
- Offer to pray over the phone.
- Offer to go grocery shopping for others who need to stay at home.
- Our homeless neighbors will be encountering more hunger as local restaurants and catering companies begin to reduce the preparation of meals. Increase giving to local foodbanks, Catholic Community Services, and St. Vincent de Paul.
- Consider donating blood or plasma.
- Purchase gas cards for your local nursing home or hospital health care providers and drop them off at the front desk as a thank you gift from the local Catholic church.