

TO: The Parish of St. Stephen, Martyr
FROM: Fr. Brian Rafferty
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Response
DATE: 16 March 2020

First and foremost, the parish and you the parishioners of St. Stephen, Martyr are in my prayers especially as I celebrate my private Mass each day. I pray that you and your families will be kept safe from all harm. With the strength that comes from God, I would encourage all of us as Catholic Christians to support our neighbors and friends with the Hope that is ours in Jesus Christ. Together as individuals and as a community we face the threat posed by the COVID-19 outbreak which has presented us with a crisis that is unprecedented in our lifetime. In recognition of this is a time that truly calls not for fear or panic but for measured, reasoned, responses based on the guidance of our public health officials at the CDC , NIH and FDA. This does mean that there is need that we remain flexible and adaptable to the circumstances as they are presented.

We all have been challenged to exercise that flexibility over these recent weeks and especially over the past few days as we have been provided with a wealth of information on the coronavirus COVID-19 VIRUS. Much of the information concerned its development, trajectory, and the statistics of infection world wide. As it took root in the U.S. there has been additional information on how to respond to it. Unfortunately the material that has been provided by government entities, health agencies and the Church has at times been confusing and constantly changing in part in the attempt to synconize our responses.

I apologize for any confusion that you have experienced during this process. We the Church and specifically the Diocese and parish are attempting to use the best methods available, according to the experts at the CDC and WHO to assure your safety and still provide you with the services that you are entitled to, albeit in a limited fashion. In line with this and the most recent directives received from Bishop Knestout the following actions have been implemented here at St. Stephen's:

1. Ladies and gentlemen, your church is not closed. The church is open for your use to come and pray during normal business hours. The only proviso is that in accord with CDC recommendations the number of people present at any time must be restricted to no more than 10. Frankly, I really don't see that as a problem at this point in time; but, I do ask that you be mindful and respectful of this mandatory requirement.
2. All public celebrations of the Mass, weekends, holy days, weekdays are suspended until future notification.
3. Priests will continue to celebrate Mass privately, as is the ancient practice. Here at St. Stephen's these Masses are celebrated early in the morning as you prepare to begin your day. These Masses are celebrated on behalf of the parish and for the universal Church to assist all those affected by COVID-19.
4. As of now we are broadcasting the audio of the Mass that I am celebrating each day. These may be listened to on the parish web-site, facebook and the app.

5. At the moment we do not have the capability to broadcast a video of Mass for those who would be interested in viewing it from home.. This is being looked into. Mass is also available for watching on EWTN and several other locations. The Bishop is also live streaming his Mass at the cathedral.
6. Weddings, and baptisms are to be celebrated only in emergencies. Funerals are to be conducted as grave side ceremonies with a Memorial Mass celebrated when this crisis has subsided. In all cases attendance is limited to immediate family not to exceed 10 people
7. All confirmations have been suspended. Pastors have been granted permission to confirm members of their congregations when things return to normal. Fortunately our youth were the first to be confirmed this year and received the sacrament from the bishop. The baptism and confirmation of members of this year's RCIA will be held as soon as the situation permits.
8. Confessions will continue to be heard. The regional service schedule for this Thursday at St. Marks has been cancelled. We will maintain pretty much our usual schedule. Saturday 1:30-4:30 p.m. Thursday 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. Weekday mornings 7:00 a.m.- 9:00 a.m. We will be using Classroom 1 so as to provide the recommended 6 ft. distancing between people. I would ask that if there are several people waiting please do so in the Commons and most definitely follow the maximum allowable number of people present held at 10.
There is however a proviso on this schedule. I am having the artificial knee replaced this Friday due to a heavy infection of the joint. Therefore confession will not be held on Saturday or the first part of the week. As soon as it is possible I will return to my schedule and you will be notified.
9. The Parish Office will be open for normal business hours in order to serve the pastoral needs of the congregation and to respond in charity to requests for assistance. Phones and emails will be answered.
10. Prayers for Communion of Intention as well as those addressing specifically the COVID-19 will be placed on the web-site and parish app and copies will be available in the church.