

May, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

As you know, the people around the world are making their way through the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. In our area faith community, we have done our part to inhibit the spread of the virus by following the stay at home directives of our civil officials and public health professionals. We are especially thankful for all the “front line” doctors, nurses, EMT’s, police officers, firefighters, grocery and other store workers, teachers, parents and everyone who is providing essential services to us.

Because of the virus we have suspended all public Masses and activities in our church buildings. The last time we were able to worship together as a community took place on the weekend of March 15th. Consequently, we have been working hard to provide recorded Masses during Holy Week and each Sunday in order to stay connected with you in prayer.

We are now working with the bishops, priests and parish leaders throughout the State of Minnesota to open our churches for some limited public Masses. We are developing a gradual, multi-phase approach to return to public worship. This phased approach will allow for the ability to re-evaluate the process as necessary in order to ensure the health and safety of the community going forward. **Throughout the State of Minnesota, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass will continue until such a time when it is safe for everyone to return to Mass.** If you do not feel safe about attending Mass you are not obligated to attend; please do only what you are comfortable doing for you and your family’s well-being and safety.

Anyone over the age of 65 is strongly encouraged not to attend public Mass on the weekends, rather you should plan to attend one of our daily Masses where there are fewer people in attendance. Also, anyone showing any symptoms of sickness, or anyone who has a household member who is sick or showing signs of sickness and/or those with a compromised immune system should not come to Church.

Should you choose to come to Mass during the weekday or weekends the following guidelines for social distancing and sanitization will be in place in our church buildings.

- We will limit attendance at each Mass to 1/3 capacity of the building. A limited number of pews will be open for people to use. Our Lady of the Lakes Church can hold 180 people at 1/3 capacity. Church of St. Mary can hold 250 people at 1/3 capacity. In order not to have too many people at any one Mass on the weekend **we ask that you register online or by calling the parish office to inform us which Mass you plan to attend each weekend.** You do not need to register for daily Mass attendance. The deadline is 4 pm on Thursday for those who prefer to call into the parish office to register for a weekend Mass.
- The worship space will be thoroughly sanitized before and after each Mass, including all entryways and doors.
- Holy water fonts have been emptied and all the hymnals have been removed. Fortunately we have the projection screens to help us fully participate in the sung and spoken prayers.
- Hand sanitizers have been placed at each entryway.
- No collection baskets will be used for people to handle. You will be asked to leave your offering in a clearly marked container/basket as you enter church or as you leave at the end of Mass.
- Doors will be propped open and one way traffic patterns will be used to ensure proper social distancing. Only the main doors under the canopy in each of our church buildings will be unlocked for you to enter church. All of the other doors can be used to exit the church but will not be available for you to enter, this will enable us to keep the traffic patterns orderly.
- You are encouraged to bring your own protective facemasks and gloves if you desire.
- You will be instructed to greet each other verbally and not with any form of touching.
- The Sign of Peace at Mass will be suspended.
- Signs will be posted to remind you of the need to uphold social distancing and to observe other safe practices to help stop the spread of the virus.
- Parents should be sure to speak to their children about how things will be very different when coming to Mass. No children's activity bags will be available for use during Mass, parents will need to bring their own items for their children to use during Mass.

- We will only be utilizing a small number of liturgical ministers for each Mass. We will be using one sacristan, one lector, four Eucharistic Ministers and some ushers, we will not be using any altar servers during this initial phase of reopening.
- Only essential worship services which includes Mass (Sunday/daily) and other sacramental celebrations (e.g. baptisms, weddings, funerals), and other devotions (Eucharistic Adoration) will be allowed at this time. No social gatherings, small group studies, or other support meetings are allowed to gather at this time.

With the recommendation of the Bishops of the State of Minnesota, Holy Communion can now be distributed after Mass has ended. In order to provide an orderly way for people to leave the church building after Mass and to reduce the number of times people are having to move in the worship space, **we will be distributing Holy Communion at the end of Mass.** At the end of Mass there will be four stations in each of our church buildings for you to come to in order to receive the Body of Christ (there will be no communion from the cup) and then to process out of the church and to return to your homes (please do not stand in the gathering area to visit with people after Mass, you may choose to stand in the parking lot, keeping proper social distance, in order to visit with people after Mass). Holy Communion will only be offered to people in their hand; no one will be able to receive Holy Communion on their tongue. Communion ministers will be wearing a mask while distributing the Body of Christ and they will disinfect their hands prior to distributing Holy Communion.

Our Summer Weekend Mass Schedule for Willmar and Spicer will be:

Saturdays

Willmar at 4:30 pm and a Spanish Mass at 6:00 pm

Spicer at 5 pm

Sundays

Willmar at 8:00 a.m.** and 9:30 am

Spicer at 10:00 am

Starting July 5th Mass in Clara City at 8:30 am will be added to our AFC.

**Please note that an additional Mass at 8:00 am has been added on Sundays at the Church of St. Mary in Willmar due to the limit of 1/3 capacity.

Our Weekday Mass Schedule for Willmar and Spicer will be:

Monday:	9:00 am in Willmar	
Tuesday:	9:00 am in Willmar	8:30 am in Spicer
Wednesday:	Noon in Willmar	5:30 pm in Spicer**
Thursday:	9:00 am in Willmar	8:30 am in Spicer
Friday:		8:30 am in Spicer

Noon in Willmar on the First Friday of each month

**Please note the change in time for the Wednesday Mass in Spicer to 5:30 pm in order to accommodate those who work and who may wish to attend Mass on the weekday rather than or in addition to the weekend.

If the current stay at home order is lifted we will begin public daily Masses on Monday, May 18th and weekend Masses on May 23/24. If not, than public Masses will only begin once the stay at home order has been lifted in our state. Please go to our website www.ourlivingwater.org for up to date information on when public Masses will begin.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the content of this letter please call your parish office and we will do our best to address them. As always we will continue to evaluate and follow the guidance and direction of civil authorities and public health experts as we move through this initial phase of reopening.

For all those who are not yet comfortable in attending Mass in person and for those who are unable to attend due to health or age, **we will continue to record the Saturday evening Mass and will make it available online and through our local cable channel** in order for you to participate with us at home. We look forward to being able to reopen our churches for public Mass and realize that it is going to take a lot of time and patience on the part of everyone to make this work.

Wishing you continued health and safety and the promise of our prayers.

Fr. Steve, Fr. Jerry and the entire area staff