



Saint Paul Roman Catholic Parish Phoenix

April 16, 2020

To St. Paul Parishioners, Families and Community:

He is Risen! Alleluia! Easter season is upon us and during the next several weeks, it is normally blending in with springtime renewal. This year is different. Our lives are different. We are experiencing incomprehensible invisible enemy (COVID-19) that is affecting our very way of life. There are no words, just feelings of sadness as the mortality rate flashes across the television news. We check with our families across the world, just to be reassured that we are grateful for the access to healthcare, food, water, and ability to stay at home without major complaints.

Since early March, our Diocese has been very proactive in responding the everchanging uncertainty that has been unfolding each week. At first, we had level 1 precautions, then week later level 2 and then 2 days later complete suspension of all Masses, events, religious education, faith formation, Catholic schools, and any gatherings with more than 10 people. We have experienced heartache with funerals without Mass, families unable to visit hospitals and yet Arizona seems to be much better off than other states. Another proactive measure is that parishes across the Diocese have been working closely to help maintain basic operations. We engaged in weekly calls and share the struggles, both in our pastoral vocation without a congregation and as parish leaders without a sustainable income.

Once again, planning and preparing against an invisible virus that has caused loss of jobs, family separation and financial ruin has been at the forefront of our conversations. The feelings are beautifully captured with Bishop Olmsted's weekly videos found on www.dphx.org/stayhealthy or Diocese of Phoenix YouTube channel. Of course, our primary mission is to be pastoral and provide spiritual formation with online Masses, Diocesan Holy Week book, parishioner outreach and more. It has forced all our parishes to do creative outreach, online Masses, social media videos and motivated me to send my personal Easter cards to parishioners. Our work is for the Lord!

Then in early March, I engaged St. Paul Finance Council so we could quickly begin to account for upcoming financial fall out. As you know, Easter is our largest plate collection, and we needed a plan. At the same time, the Diocese mandated several immediate cost savings initiatives. This included an immediate 25% pay cut to all priests for 6 months and furlough directive for Diocese Pastoral Center staff. The financial ramifications of the COVID-19 are felt at every parish and Diocese around the world.

For St. Paul, I was profoundly humbled as our staff had already voluntarily cut their hours in early March and more recently, the way MaryAnn Symancyk & Daena Mireau were so understanding with reduction of staff changes. In addition, remaining staff member's hours were reduced and



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granted temporary reduction in salary. In these situations, it is of utmost important that people understand it is not about an individual performance. In fact, we are incredibly grateful to Maryann Symancyk and Daena Mireau and the entire staff for their outstanding performance, dedication, and service. As with all staff reductions and with the complete suspension of church activities, we could not support roles that would not be needed for undetermined amount of time. I am proud that the staff has recognized these changes with humility. I am grateful to Fr. Ishaya for stepping up and oversee ongoing formation of our catechumens (RCIA) so we can welcome to our Catholic way of life. Additionally, I acknowledge our Pastoral Associate, Craig Cullity for absorbing more job roles and leading remaining staff.

At this point, we do not know how many weeks, months we will be suspended, nor do we know if we can go back fully, partially, or will the virus come back again? We planned for the current suspension scenario but remain hopeful that we can restore our Church to full operations.

Finally, with the Finance Council and Diocese's guidance, St. Paul is actively researching and applying for any grants, government assistance (Care Act, Payroll Assistance), bank programs, etc. that will ultimately provide relief. I also acknowledge the many parishioners who continue to give online or mail/drop off their weekly envelopes. May God bless each one of your families for your faithful devotional tithes. Because of your generosity, our parish is fortunate compared to some parishes with 90% drop in income. I believe with these early interventions; the parish will be quicker to recover, and we pray that this extended absence will strengthen the faithful and they will return with full resolve and devotion.

As your Pastor, I am deeply concerned for your overall welfare. I empathize and share the feelings of uncertainly and pray deeply for our staff and parishioners. I am also lifted spiritually by families and parishioners who have shared how this pandemic has extended their prayer time, family time and reevaluate values. Fr. Ishaya and I are praying for your intentions. Feel free to send your intentions to admin@stpaulphoenix.org so we can add to our lists.

Just like our Lord, we will Rise and be stronger than ever as a community of faith, hope and love. We must believe with God all things are possible. (Matthew 19:26).

May God Bless You,

REV. FR. DINDO C. CUARIO
Pastor