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Dear Friends in Christ,

We are putting together the second issue of DISCIPLE with no idea whether we will be celebrating the Mass together again when it reaches you. When Archbishop Hebda announced the suspension of all public Masses as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, my response was the same as that of many of you: What can we do to still distribute Holy Communion to people and maintain the integrity of the Mass?

This desire comes, in part, from a sincere love of the Lord, truly present in the Eucharist. But our disappointment at being deprived of receiving the Blessed Sacrament also stems from how blessed we are to be able to celebrate the Mass at all, much less every day of the week and four times each weekend.

At each Mass, just before distributing Holy Communion, the congregation prays the words of the Roman centurion, whose faith saved the life of his servant: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed” (Matthew 8:8). Notice that the centurion believes Jesus’ physical presence is not needed to facilitate this physical healing—only our faith and His divine will and word.

God distributes the gifts of physical healing and interior transformation primarily through the sacraments and our faith, but He is not limited by them. In this time of uncertainty and Lenten sacrifice, may we be at peace, knowing that Jesus does not abandon us. His presence, His word, His very name, have the power to save.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Peter Richards
Pastor
Adoration Grows In Absence of Mass

In November, when Steve House took over the role of Adoration chapel coordinator from Rob and Jeanne Van Drasek, he hoped to grow the number of adorers significantly. Of course, he did not expect the coronavirus outbreak this winter. Amid the disruption, uncertainty and stress, God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy, continues to bless our parish.

The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus is truly present—Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity—in the Holy Eucharist. Eucharistic Adoration is the practice of praying before Jesus in the flesh, in the consecrated Host, displayed in a sacred vessel called a monstrance.

Parishioners volunteer to pray before the Blessed Sacrament at all hours of the day and night, except during Mass times, which keeps the chapel open for others to visit as they are able. A leadership team of four division leaders, a database system manager and 22 hourly coordinators oversees assigned times of the day in case there are any administrative needs or operational issues to be addressed.

St. Michael is blessed with a small chapel, called the Resurrection Chapel, just inside the main doors of the church building. Recently the location for Adoration changed, at least for the time being.

“When the archbishop gave the faithful dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, we anticipated an increase in the number of people wanting to adore,” House said. “To accommodate more people and still allow for social distancing, we moved the monstrance from the chapel to the main altar in the church. During hours in which two or three adorers are usually scheduled, we began seeing several people spread throughout the church. People were dropping in after work, even for a few minutes, to spend time with the Lord. The Church has always been the faithful’s haven in these kinds of circumstances, and she remains so today.”

When the outbreak began, House was testing a new system for signing up and signing in adorers, called We Adore Him, including a simple touchscreen interface. Initial testing of the system went very well, and rollout to all scheduled adorers began the week of March 23. When Adoration moved to the main altar on March 15, the touchscreen and a stylus moved with it, and people began using it as a matter of course. House had planned to staff each hour of Adoration with someone prepared to introduce the new system, but quickly found there was no need.

“Our adorers really stepped up to the change. It’s been inspiring for me,” House said.

As concerns about the spread of the virus increased, House and parish leaders added seating protocols to increase spacing between adorers (the church accommodates 1,500 people) and to disinfect the areas where adorers have knelt or sat to pray. Even with the additional concerns, the steady stream of adorers, a few at a time, continued.

With the new sign-in system, scheduled adorers who cannot fulfill their hour or don’t feel safe doing so can request a sub quickly and easily. The parish hopes to offer Adoration as safely and for as many hours each day as possible to parishioners hungry for the Eucharist.

“For now, we’re still able to adore in the church,” House said at the time of this writing. “That could change anytime, but I hope to keep it open as much as we can for people who want to come and pray. We’ve never had more interest in Adoration than we do right now. We hope this devotion to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist continues when life returns to normal in our parish.”
What a difference a week makes: On Wednesday, March 11, the St. Michael Catholic Church Facebook page promoted a three-day parish mission with Dan DeMatte, and the first issue of the new DISCIPLE newsletter had arrived at the parish office.

Two days later, Archbishop Bernard Hebda announced that the faithful of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis were dispensed of their Sunday obligation to attend Mass if they didn’t feel safe doing so due to the coronavirus outbreak. Parish staff began cancelling or postponing events that were less important than the Mass. On Sunday, Bishop Andrew Cozzens announced the closure of Catholic schools in the archdiocese on or before March 18, and Principal Jenny Haller shared that St. Michael Catholic School (StMCS) would close on March 16, in keeping with the local school district.

Then, on the evening of Wednesday, March 18, Archbishop Hebda announced the suspension of all public Masses in the archdiocese.

“We were so happy to be connected to our St. Michael ‘home’! I had been very sad to miss Mass today because of virus concerns. This was an unexpected and real blessing.”

Tonia Wagner
Virtual Communion

The parish was already working on livestreaming capabilities before the outbreak. Knights of Columbus Council 4174 donated $5,000 for the purchase of a video camera for the worship space, and Perry and Curt Zachman and Steve Sustacek had been working to get it running, but it had never been used to livestream Mass.

Less than an hour before the Saturday evening Mass on March 14, the team shared links for all four weekend Masses. People tuned in immediately, and despite a lack of audio on Saturday evening (which was fixed for Sunday), the feedback was resoundingly positive.

“My husband and I watched in our home office on the computer,” said parishioner Tonia Wagner. “We were so happy to be connected to our St. Michael ‘home’! I had been very sad to miss Mass today because of virus concerns. This was an unexpected and real blessing.”

By the time public Masses were suspended, the parish was streaming all scheduled Masses and encouraging parishioners to pray the Act of Spiritual Communion, as well as broadcasting Perpetual Adoration, Stations of the Cross and live rosaries.

Faith from a Distance

Youth Ministry at St. Michael is rooted in small groups and personal relationships, so social distancing poses a particular problem. With approximately 60 adult-led Discipleship Groups (D-groups) for students in grades 8-12, the challenge could not be met without an organized and consistent approach. Ruth Gladitsch led the effort to implement Zoom, an online meeting platform, and train leaders to use it. In less than two weeks time, more than half of existing groups had met at least once online—and the same technology is leveraged to pray group rosaries, conduct virtual Core Team meetings and Extreme Faith Camp training, and hold parish staff meetings.

While Learning In Faith Together (LIFT), our family faith formation program, is suited for at-home delivery, other programs like Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) and sacrament preparation are more hands-on. Bob Swift and Andrea Zachman quickly prepared materials for LIFT, First Reconciliation/First Communion and Confirmation, delivering them to families via email and the parish website. CGS and Children’s Liturgy of the Word, unfortunately, are suspended for now.

Curbside Confessions and More

Following the archbishop’s lead, the parish had to decide what else it still could do, safely and responsibly, to care for the spiritual needs of its people. Perpetual Adoration moved from the small Adoration chapel to the main worship space, enabling people to pray before the Blessed Sacrament while maintaining social distancing.

Desire for the sacrament of Reconciliation remained strong. To accommodate this desire safely, our priests moved from the confines of the regular confessionals, first setting up screened, makeshift confessionals in the church, then taking Reconciliation to the streets. Stationed along the lane that connects the upper and lower church parking lots, on March 24, Fr. Peter Richards and Fr. Joe Zabinski heard drive-up confessions and gave penance and absolution, playfully doing jumping jacks between penitents to stay warm. The location of outdoor confessions shifted on Thursday morning, with Fr. Richards emerging from a heated fish-house for drive-through or walk-up confessions. The sacrament was scheduled from 8 to 8:30 AM, but the line continued until after 9:30 AM.

On March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, Fr. Richards streamed a special Mass from the church. That afternoon, Governor Tim Walz announced a two-week stay-at-home order for the state of Minnesota, and Archbishop Hebda urged all the Catholic faithful to comply as best they can. Ongoing updates from our parish may be found on the parish homepage, stmcatholicchurch.org.

Additional Information

- For more on Perpetual Adoration, see our featured ministry article on page 3.
- For more on St. Michael Catholic School’s response to the virus and sudden closure, see our school article on page 7.
So Pilate went back into the praetorium and summoned Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?” Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants [would] be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here.” So Pilate said to him, “Then you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” … Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged.  

– John 18:33-38; 19:1

The Second Sorrowful Mystery is the Scourging at the Pillar, in which our Lord endures countless cruel lashes at the hands of the Romans in Pilate’s misguided hope that such a brutal punishment might appease the Jewish crowd who has handed Him over to be crucified. Pilate himself tells the crowd he finds no guilt in Jesus, but he also fails to stand up for the truth. Instead, he washes his hands of the matter, allowing an innocent man to be beaten and killed in order to maintain a semblance of worldly order and peace.

We see Jesus, stripped to the waste, bent and bound to the cold stone pillar, while the red lash of the whips curl around Him. His remaining clothes are red, white, and purple—the colors of passion and martyrdom, divine purity, and kingship—and the praetorium has taken on the dignity of a temple: the pillar is a stately white Roman column, not unlike those in the church, but with a decorative base and capital, and again, the barred prison window in the background is arched like the baldacchino. Christ, the King of the Universe, is present even in this place of punishment and pain, in the Body and the Blood.

**STAY CONNECTED!**

D-Groups are still meeting online during the quarantine, and our Youth Ministers are still available for youth and teens who want to talk. Our youth also gather online every evening at 9 PM to pray the rosary and talk.

For more information and the latest updates, visit stmacatholicyouth.org/updates-covid19 or call the parish office, 763-497-2745.
Could you completely rethink the way you do your job, then deliver on the new model, in a week’s time? That’s exactly the challenge faced by St. Michael Catholic School (StMCS) staff following the suspension of in-person classes by the Minnesota Department of Education and the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. One day, teachers and students expected to return from Spring Break to business as usual; two days later, school was cancelled for at least two more weeks, and teachers were preparing to deliver distance-learning across all subjects beginning March 30.

StMCS Principal Jenny Haller has been hired as the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence’s (CSCOE) first director of excellence and was set to depart in late March. CSCOE graciously granted her request to stay on with the school through this crisis. Within days, she and StMCS teachers and staff were working together to learn new technologies, convert lesson plans for online delivery and prepare student materials and personal items for drive-through pickup.

Lighthearted videos on social media showed teachers experimenting with video technology, encouraging students to stay active and engaged during quarantine and taking a dance-party “brain break” together in the school gymnasium.

“I couldn’t be more proud of this team and how they have collaborated to address this challenge,” Haller said. “Our staff members have their own families and concerns, but they love their students and their work. They have been completely committed to making this work for our families.”

Fr. Peter Richards stopped into the school to check on the school’s progress and was impressed and humbled by what he saw. “They deserve our thanks and our prayers,” he said. “Several of them shared that this is the toughest thing they’ve ever had to do in their careers.”

In less than a week’s time, families were equipped with materials and tools to prepare for school at home. Second trimester report cards were made available via the parent portal, and StMCS social media accounts were lighting up with greetings and encouragement from staff to students and families, and vice versa.

“No one expected or desired the situation we currently face,” said Haller. “But necessity has greatly expanded our capabilities in a very short time. I can’t wait to see how our school continues to benefit from what we’ve learned after the outbreak is over.”

On March 30, StMCS’s distance learning plan officially began and will continue into early May at least. Please pray for our teachers, staff and students, that they may continue to grow in knowledge and faith in Christ during this challenging time.
SUNDAY MASS
Saturday Vigil 5 PM
Sunday 8 AM, 10:30 AM, 6 PM

WEEKDAY MASS
Monday 7:30 AM
Tuesday 6:30 PM
Wednesday 7:30 AM at St. Albert
Thursday 7:30 AM
Friday 7:45 AM (Summer 7:30 AM)
First Saturday 8 AM

RECONCILIATION
Saturday 7:30-9 AM, 3:30-4:45 PM
(except 7:45-8:30 AM on first Saturdays)
Sunday 9:30-10:15 AM
Tuesday 5:15-6:15 PM
Thursday 8-8:30 AM

WE ARE STILL ONE BODY

Holy Week Schedule
Holy Thursday April 9, 7:30 PM Mass
Good Friday April 10, 3 PM Service
Holy Saturday April 11, 8:30 PM Easter Vigil Mass (no 5 PM Mass)
Easter Sunday April 12, 8:30 and 10:30 AM Masses (no 6 PM Mass)
The last opportunity for confession prior to Easter Sunday is Tuesday,
April 7, 5:15 to 6:15 PM. There will be no confessions Holy Thursday
through Easter Sunday. All liturgies will be streamed from the link on
our homepage, stmcatholicchurch.org.

Get the Latest
Until we are able to gather again for Mass and other parish events,
the best way to keep up with happenings in our parish is via
the Daily Updates issued at 3:30 PM on our parish homepage,
stmcatholicchurch.org, and Facebook, @stmcatholicchurch.

We Need Your Support
Even with public Masses and school suspended, we still pay for staff,
facilities, debt service and more—as well as providing charitable
support for those in need. Please continue to donate if you are able.
Mail in or drop off your envelope, complete an electronic funds transfer
(EFT) form for automatic withdrawal, or donate online using the Virtual
Offertory button on our homepage, stmcatholicchurch.org.