VIRTUAL MASSES DURING SUMMER 2020

Dear members of the Santa Clara University family,

Little did we know, in mid-March, that our Lenten “Eucharistic Fast” would last three months. It has been that long since we had the opportunity to gather together physically and celebrate the Banquet of the Lamb together in Mission Santa Clara or in other churches. Sheltering in place coupled with separation from physical participation at Mass has been emotionally and spiritually trying for many. But perhaps it enables us to understand the pain that many Christians throughout the ages have felt when circumstances have limited the access to the Sacraments.

As news reports have publicized, churches in California are now permitted to have public worship services again, subject to state and local guidelines, which apply both to the worship space and to those in attendance. Currently, in Santa Clara County, starting on June 15, public Masses may be celebrated, but they must take place outside with a maximum of 25 people, a number that includes the priest and other ministers needed. Guidelines also require churches to keep records of all in attendance in case contact tracing is needed later. For this reason and to ensure that no more than the permitted number of people attend, most parishes in California are requiring pre-registration for anyone wishing to attend a Mass.

Mission Santa Clara depends on the staff of Santa Clara University for any event happening outside the Mission itself. Given the current reduction in on-site University workers, and that a limited staff works on weekends, it would be very difficult to arrange an outdoor Mass under the mandatory guidelines without incurring significant expense. In addition, especially during the summer, it will be difficult to provide both an in-person Mass and to live-stream the Mass for the sake of those who choose to remain at home because of their vulnerable status.

There is no indication as to when the local health authorities will increase the maximum or will allow indoor worship services. In addition, state guidelines for indoor activities require that a space must be disinfected after each event, along with keeping all doors open (with attendants present to ensure that everyone entering the space has a valid reservation) during the event itself.

In light of these and other challenges in the short term and after consultation, it seems best not to schedule any in-person Masses at Mission Santa Clara at least through August.

Please know that this choice has not been made without much thought. The reality of the current situation has been considered in much depth. In the short term the greater good is served when more people can see a live-stream Mass rather than a few (less than 20) who could participate in person; the greater good is served when we follow the explicit directives, recommendations and protocols of the county, the diocese, the University, and the Jesuits West province regarding safety related to the spreading of the coronavirus, especially related to those who are most vulnerable; the greater good is served when we don’t overburden the few staff members who are, in fact, present during this summer in a deserted campus.
Parishes in the diocese (and in neighboring dioceses) will be scheduling public Masses. We know that the lack of in-person Masses at Mission Santa Clara will be a disappointment for many, but given the limited resources at the immediate disposal of the Mission staff, and given the detailed regulations, we felt that waiting until later in the summer was the best viable option.

We all want to return to “normalcy” as soon as possible. News reports suggest that we may have to accept a “new normal” for over a year, unfortunately. It is our hope that we can return to celebrating Mass in the Mission for anyone as soon as possible, but we can only do that when it is safe for all, including the staff and the limited number of available priests. In the meantime, we continue to pray for those scientists working to find treatments and vaccines for an ailment we never thought would be so devastating and disruptive a year ago. We will be communicating updates about Masses in the Mission as the situation evolves in the months ahead.

**From June 21 through September 6, we will plan to continue a simple virtual Sunday Mass at 10 a.m. All are welcome to view the weekly LiveStream on YouTube. Those interested in attending on Zoom and/or assisting, please complete this form: Register to participate/Assist in Zoom Masses.**

Blessings -- keep well!

Fr. Dennis Smolarski, S.J.
Director of Campus Ministry
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