

Living with the Unknown

“The best laid plans of mice and men, often go awry”

Robert Burns

During the past eight months, we have faced many challenges in the United States. A good exercise we all might want to undertake is an inventory of how we have changed or adapted. My guess is many of us have made adjustments in ways we could never have imagined.

For myself, I have found my computer skills are growing because I have been put in a variety of situations. I have discovered new ways to use my I-phone and how to upload videos to **YouTube**. I am learning to be more flexible.

More importantly, I am seeing the generosity of the people of this parish in so many practices. I see the creativity of the Staff of Our Lady of the Woods in ways that have touched me deeply. In other words, there has been grace even in the midst of tragedy.

How about you? What have you discovered about yourself these past eight months? Have you learned new ways to connect? Have you discovered the difference between loneliness and solitude? Do you see the Lord’s grace in different ways? I imagine we must each answer that for ourselves.

I am finding the planning for the future is challenging because we do not know what the future will bring. In March, it was how to close a church. In April, we struggled to plan Easter without knowing what Easter would bring. I assumed I would make only a few weekly videos but I am approaching the thirty-fifth upload. I struggled with how to keep staff on salary, how to plan the fiscal year budget, how to open Religious Education safely, and so much more. Each time we think we have it figured out, we have learned we must adjust. Our best laid plans do not always materialize. Sometimes, something better happens. Sometimes it does not.

Even in personal terms COVID ended an annual Independence Day gathering my friend from college hosts, along with a Labor Day gathering that I host. It caused the postponement of a friend's daughter's wedding, and the cancellation of Christmas plans.

I imagine that you have experienced similar challenges. "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." As I write this the COVID-19 Virus seems to be infecting an increasing number of people. Hospitalizations are up around the country yet the death rate has held steady. New treatments and vaccines are appearing within our horizon. How this will unfold and on what timeline is anyone's guess.

We should all be proud of the Catholic Church's commitment to keeping people safe. The protocols followed by the churches throughout the state have shown that we are doing exactly that.

As a parish we need to plan and so I will let you know today how we hope to celebrate Christmas this year. These plans have been carefully worked out by the staff, the opening team, and the Archdiocese. Like everything these days, it assumes we will be able to have worship that is safe and prayerful. Forces beyond our control could change everything.

We continue to put safety first and this will include Christmas services. Every time we gather for Mass we check on registration, make sure people are wearing face coverings and sanitizing their hands. We seat people using social distancing protocols while sanitizing the church, washrooms, and doorways between each service.

This Christmas Eve and Christmas Day we will have 8 Masses rather than 6. This is based on previous Christmas attendance patterns and will include 2 Masses celebrated in the Finnegan Center. The Mass at Night (often called Midnight Mass) will be moved to 10:00 PM to make it easier for our volunteers and cleaning crew. Registration will be required. To ensure we can manage the number of attendees, we will close registration early and have our greeters check off names as you arrive.

We also will have a short range FM broadcast so that the Mass in church can be heard in the parking lot for those who arrive and find “there is no room in the inn,” as it were. We will also broadcast Christmas Mass on the parish website.

Of course, we may be forced to modify these plans as the pandemic seems to be worsening, but at this point we are doing our best to safely accommodate all those who would wish to celebrate the Nativity of the Lord.