

## BECOMING A STRONGER PARISH IN THE TIME OF A PANDEMIC

I am in awe of the strength and resilience of our faith community. We are rising to the challenges placed before us. We are seeking new ways to take time to pray, we are following the guidelines offered to us by the Church, the federal, state and local government agencies. I realize this is not easy to do. I realize this is a hardship for all. I see agencies refraining from turning off water; I see people offering to grocery shop for the elderly and children taking time to visit their elderly parents when possible. I realize with each new day there are new challenges. I realize with each new day more is shared and more is expected.

It is my joy to know God has called us to live in this moment, God chose us to live in a time of a pandemic, different from surviving the big snow of the 60's and the stock market crashes. We are in this moment and God has something for us to learn. I ask myself, what is this about? I ask when and how will this come to resolution? These answers we do not have, nor can we control, yet my faith in Jesus is my choice. I choose Him. My prayer life has been challenged to go deeper. Making decisions for the parish to keep it safe has not been easy. Finding ways to be present to the grief of what used to be that is no longer is just a springboard to ask new questions. While I have invited the staff to cut their budgets, we also have canceled things before they could arrive. Canceling the palms for Palm Sunday was a difficult call for me. Yet, if the church is closed, and they cannot be distributed was it an expenditure that was necessary? I take these things very seriously. I also need your help. I ask you, to the best of your ability, to continue stewardship so we can maintain the upkeep of our building, its cleaning and sanitation and the ability of the staff to connect us to the things that are sacred and holy. While it is by different avenues, they are doing great. E-giving and mailing in envelopes will go a long way. Only essential expenditures are being made. Our staff was ahead of the game at understanding the gravity of this pandemic. I thank them for that.

FORMED is a great resource to which the parish has a subscription and everyone can jump on. Go to: [stanneparish.formed.org](http://stanneparish.formed.org) to sign up. Get connected with our parish code and find things to enrich your prayer life at this time. I hope to create a link to great podcasts, and while I have not ventured to make one, there is a wealth of wisdom to be listened to in many that are available.

Personal holy hours are life-giving. All of our Mass intentions are being remembered during the private Mass I have by myself in the rectory chapel. These are times my heart not only breaks, but also finds strength because I feel connected to all of you. I go back to the Christian song, *I Can Only Imagine*. I can only imagine what the day will look like when we will all be welcomed back to the church building to celebrate in public. Our singing, our joy, our responses will shake the entire earth. While I look forward to that day, I embrace the present moment with faith. I am here for you. I will continue to write Bulletin articles, I will continue to produce a YouTube video of the Sunday Mass and with the deacons we will work out how to celebrate the three sacred days of the Triduum, if we cannot open up the church.

God has never given up on us. It is time we do not give up on Him. Live the faith vibrantly.



Father John

## DO YOU BELIEVE? I HAVE COME TO BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD

Belief has so many levels, so many heights and depths. Consistent in almost all images of belief, is not only that it is tested, but that it is invited to re-prioritize our perspective of life. In the past few weeks we have been invited, whether we like it or not, to re-prioritize and reset our compass for a new life. In the stores that have had empty shelves, we find choices not only being taken from us but our perspective shift. I used to be loyal to certain brands. I like certain hot dogs and certain hot dog buns. I feel the brand I like tastes the best. Yet with little available on the shelves, any hot dog will do. I used to like a certain brand of pasta, but with nothing left on a shelf, any pasta will do and it tastes so good. We have moved from what tastes best to just being happy to have anything on the shelf we can purchase. All of this in just two weeks. My belief has changed from what is essential to my diet and in the way I want it, to cherishing every taste and texture of the food I am cooking. This is a new place in which I find myself. Brand names matter no more. Not only have I settled for what was available, but I have learned to cherish it. This is the new life and new world.

Jesus goes to the tomb of Lazarus and He weeps. He encounters Martha and as they look at what is, they know all of what it can become. Jesus brings about belief in an unimaginable way. Jesus invites those gathered to see new life. He asks Martha, "do you believe?" He knows the answer, but seeing the answer is beyond comprehension. What was is no more. She will cherish time with Lazarus, she will deepen her trust, a trust that was already deep. She believed that Jesus is the Son of God who has the power to bring new life.

The invitation of the Gospel is to cherish those things that really matter, such as our trust in Jesus and the time shared with those we love. Our pandemic is inviting us to go with Martha to the tomb. We are to re-profess our faith and know we will see with new eyes and a new heart the things that are new life. When we do, we are to cherish them. Martha was given more time with her brother. In our Stay in Place, we are given more time to cherish those around us. We are given more time to reconnect with the essential, the beautiful and the wonderful. We are to allow this to lead us to a conviction that the world and the virus cannot take away. Jesus is Lord. He is the Son of God and I do believe.



Reverend John J. Ouper