

May 8th, 2020

Dear All,

As the shelter-in-place order drags on, I want to call attention to the many, many ways the life of the parish continues: the YADAs continue to make grocery runs and other errands helping parishioners get the supplies they need. Our Hot Meals ministry has continued to offer socially distant, bagged meals for the hungry and the vulnerable. A phone tree has sprung up, in which a team of caring people are endeavoring to keep in touch with every single member of the parish. A veritable army of sewers has mustered spontaneously, making masks and PPE for hospitals and front-line medical workers.

Zoom meetings galore have been happening, both formal and informal, among many of the parish's ministries including Sunday morning coffee hour, office hours with myself and Fr. Hiller, the choir, the vestry, the staff, and various of our boards and committees. You have created spontaneous prayer groups with one another, meeting by phone and Zoom. You have taken on added spiritual disciplines carrying one another and our world in prayer. Some of you are taking new classes online, some are taking up new subjects through independent reading; some are taking on new projects, new hobbies, or deepening your skill at familiar ones. Some are getting involved in your neighborhood organizations for the first time. I've even been hearing about socially distant meet-ups on sidewalks, in parking lots, and through open windows. And I hear your gardens have never been better tended!

Meanwhile our liturgical life continues, with live-streamed Sunday morning Eucharistic worship from the chancel at St. Mark's, and the Daily Office being said in homes across the parish. There's no doubt in my mind: while the parish buildings may be closed, St. Mark's remains a busy hive of activity!

As the closure continues, I'm sure we will find yet more ways to be in touch with each other, to undertake ministry together, and to engage in deeper formation as Christians. But before we get too caught up in asking the question, "what does it mean to be the church in a time of pandemic," I suggest we stop to look around and see — we have already answered that question. Not officially, and not formally, but somehow St. Mark's has intuited that to "be the church" in this time means staying in touch with each other, looking after one another as best we can, tending to the needs of the vulnerable, and above all continuing to say our prayers; in short, integrating our lives with one another such that they might articulate that vital core of our faith: "You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." (From St. Augustine)

Certainly there are more details to be filled out. But I hope it's an immense encouragement to you all that this is the path we've stumbled on, entirely organically. It is certainly an encouragement to me! Whatever else we do in the course of the pandemic, I hope it continues to help steer us towards that rest which is both our foundation and our reward: rest in which the world finds its heart and purpose, in which the work of creation is not only complete but whole and at peace.

Yours faithfully,
Fr. Blake