COMMUNICATION

The challenge of being together and being apart

I am writing this column at the very time I would normally be celebrating one of our two Sunday liturgies. On one hand that seems terribly wrong, but on the other hand, what I’m doing is similar to what I might be doing as we anticipate the start of Mass — welcoming people, checking-in, clarifying some details.

And, most importantly, we engage in giving thanks and praise to God — Together! The sadness, frustration, confusion, maybe even anger in not being able to do that now is a reality we all share.

While we have exerted considerable effort to communicate various cancelations and on-line opportunities with parishioners, I’ve also realized that a large segment of our community does not have access to or utilize the internet and associated social media platforms.

This newsletter is our attempt to connect with those parishioners. If you’re one of them, I’m sorry we couldn’t communicate with you sooner. The reality is this experience has developed and evolved so quickly that it’s been nearly impossible to get a handle on what’s happening now, much less what might be happening tomorrow or next week. As a result, written communication risks being

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FINDING OUR WAY THROUGH UNCERTAIN TIMES

What do we even call what we are experiencing? I am reluctant to call it a crisis, although potentially it is. It is an ordeal, but the burden of the ordeal varies dramatically from person to person. At stanneswausau.org we call it “A Time of Precaution.”

Regardless of what we call it, these days have totally discombobulated our lives—as individuals and families; and as a parish. As we sing in a wonderful Advent hymn: “The verities we knew, seem shaken and untrue.” Mass on Sunday, the St. Anne Fish Fry on Lenten Fridays, Forming Young Disciples on Wednesday night, school every morning — it’s all on hold. Not to mention, jobs and paychecks we may no longer have, businesses and services no longer available ... I don’t need to make the list, you know it all too well.

So, what does a parish do in such circumstances?

First of all, we pray. We pray for those whose very lives are threatened by the onslaught of this disease, and for families who already know its fatal realities. We pray for the vast array of health care professionals who work to seek cures and to care for those who are ill.

We pray for the isolated and vulnerable, those for whom days alone can be mentally and spiritually threatening. We pray for parents and children who adapt to profound challenges. We pray for the poor who always realize the heaviest burden in times of crisis.

And we pray that as a parish we will always remember a central demand of discipleship: to love our neighbor. We’ll explain in this newsletter how we’ll try to honor that commandment.

— Fr. Tom Lindner
IN THIS TIME OF PRECAUTION

Let’s go down the list

Some of this may be “old news” to parishioners connected through email, social media and stanneswausau.org, but we also want to update those who do not have such access.

WHAT’S CANCELED: Essentially, everything. Decisions to cancel Mass and other programs were made the week of March 16 based upon a state emergency order, as well as recommendations from Bishop Callahan and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. The church is open for individuals or families to pray 7 a.m.-4 p.m. weekdays, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, and 8 a.m.-noon Sunday, but we also need to honor stay-at-home and social-distancing precautions.

OFFICE CLOSED: The parish office is closed until further notice. Staff members are working from home, but will check email and voicemail regularly, and are meeting regularly through Zoom, a video communication platform.

REACHING OUT TO THE VULNERABLE: An immediate concern has been our homebound and, potentially, most isolated parishioners. By the time you receive this newsletter, Fr. Tom’s intention was to check-in by phone with parishioners “of a certain age” and to offer further attention and support. If we did not reach you and we can assist you in some way, call 715.849.3930. If you’re willing to assist with such outreach, send an email to mail@stanneswausau.org.

PASTORAL CARE: Pastoral care of people in hospitals and nursing homes is severely limited. Visits are tightly controlled, if allowed at all. If you or a family member would like to be anointed, please contact Fr. Tom to make arrangements at frtom@stanneswausau.org or 715.849.3930, ext. 309. If you or a family member is hospitalized and want Fr. Tom or Deacon Erv to visit, let them know, since visits otherwise are not allowed.

COMMUNICATION: We want to stay connected and engaged, not just to provide news, but also to offer resources for prayer, worship and reflection. Here’s how we’ll do that:

EMAIL: There will be two weekly emails sent to all parishioners: one on Thursday will include a video from Fr. Tom reporting news and sharing observations; a second sent late Saturday afternoon will offer a guide to Sunday worship and a link to the Lord’s Day Mass. If you are not receiving these emails, send an email to mail@stanneswausau.org and we’ll add you to the list. If you aren’t connected via email, and if it’s possible for you to do this, now is a good time to establish that connection. Ask a relative or friend to help you, or call us at 715.849.3930.

BULLETIN: A bulletin will be published each week and will be available in church, as well as at stanneswausau.org. If you don’t have email or internet access, call the office and we’ll mail you a copy.

STANNESWAUSAU.ORG: The parish web site is updated as news warrants, but more importantly offers links for praying the Stations of the Cross, the rosary and other means of prayer; links to daily Mass and readings for Mass; links to Sunday Mass opportunities; Fr. Tom’s weekly video; and other resources.

ST ANNE PARISH ON FACEBOOK: This is an easy place to regularly receive news and prayer opportunities, as well as stay connected with family and friends. If you have resisted social media, this might be a good time to give it a try. Again, if you have internet access and want to give Facebook a try, let us know, or ask a friend or relative—they’d be glad to help you.

ONGOING FINANCIAL SUPPORT: It may be unseemly to raise such a pedestrian matter, but there is a business reality connected with parish life. While we won’t be heating the church or clearing the parking lot if there’s a snowstorm, other bills and salaries will still need to be paid. If you are able, please continue your stewardship of financial support to the parish. Check and cash contributions can be mailed to the parish or slipped under the office door. This might be a time to consider on-line/direct payment giving, as many parishioners already do. Call Bobbi Gadke at 715.849.3930, ext. 310, to get started.
TRYING TO KEEP THE LORD’S DAY HOLY

How do we come to terms with not celebrating Sunday Mass? As with most aspects of our new reality, we adapt and resort to whatever means are available — and that are safe.

On the Fourth Sunday of Lent we offered a video experience of the Mass recorded in our church with Fr. Tom presiding. The initial response was positive. However, this requires ministers to assist with the Mass, albeit within the established limits. As best we are able and for as long as it is feasible, we will continue this experiment in worship and technology.

In addition, the TV Mass of the Diocese of La Crosse is broadcast on Channel 12 at 6:30 a.m. Sunday, and 6 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. Sunday on cable Channel 980.

There also are several Lord’s Day celebrations to choose from on the internet, with links at stanneswausau.org.

None of this takes the place of gathering together — as the Body of Christ — but these are our best, most viable and, really, only options at this point. However we connect with our worship, we are united even in our separations.

TRIDUUM: Three days at home

The “great” three days will be a little less great this year as we adapt to honoring the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus without the ancient and regarded words and rituals of those days, and without one another.

Already the Vatican has offered guidance for what awaits us: no foot-washing on Holy Thursday, no fire at the Easter Vigil, with several provisions acknowledging the difficulty for some of celebrating these days at all.

As this newsletter is being prepared, the plan is for St. Anne’s Triduum liturgies to be celebrated in a modified fashion in our church. Video of the Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil liturgies will be made available through email and the internet. Times have not yet been determined.

PALM SUNDAY: As of now, palms will be blessed and available outside the church’s main entrance from 3-5 p.m. Saturday April 4 and 8:30-11:30 a.m. Sunday April 5. Palms also will be available in church during Holy Week.

WHAT IS THIS GOSPEL ABOUT?

A man born blind is made to see.

That might be what happens. But, it’s not really what the gospel is about.

It’s a story of intrigue, interrogation, resistance, revelation. It’s a story of light vs. darkness, sight vs. blindness, knowing vs. not knowing, even willful ignorance in the face of proof.

Some of that, maybe too much of that, resonates with all that’s happening around us. Even when the sun is shining brightly, there is a darkness of confusion, bewilderment.

It’s from within the midst of this darkness, this blindness, this not knowing — that we struggle to find our way. Every day I feel as if I’m walking through a totally dark room, trying to find my way to the light switch or a door without tripping over a chair or walking into a wall. All of us, day to day, are trying to find our way.

And yet I endure these days — I try to feel my way through that dark room — without the burdens that increasingly haunt so many others. I, thankfully, don’t have to worry about paying bills because I’ve been laid off, or figuring out how to take care of my kids when I’m supposed to be at work, or struggling to help my seventh grader with math problems I can’t comprehend.

I try to feel my way through the darkness without having to face the loneliness, the uncertainty, the sadness of being alone days on end with only endless chatter on TV to keep me company, news that only enhances my isolation and worry; without worrying, as a restaurant owner might, about how to recover from weeks, maybe months of being closed; without the disappointment of missing out on the final months of college and maybe even graduation; without having to cancel a long-awaited adventure; or, most regrettable, without being able to be with a mother, dying in a nursing home, because no visitors are allowed. You can fill in the blank with your reality.

These are the things that haunt us now, the harsh realities that trap us in the darkness.

You were once in darkness, Paul reminds the Ephesians. But now you are light in Christ. Live as children of light — the light that produces all that is good and right and true.

Wow — if there was ever a time in which we needed to live as children of the light — the light of Christ — the light of all that is good and right and true — this would be one of those times.

Possibly shining the light by checking on an isolated neighbor or relative; offering a bit of relief to an overwhelmed parent; extending assistance to a financially strapped friend; staying connected and engaged by phone or Facebook or email or a letter with those who know, or hardly know, but who most need our attention and care. And doing it all, of course, largely, by staying apart. These are clearly days of creativity — and trust.

Remember that encouragement of Paul: Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness. Live in the light. If you’re an individual, a couple, a family, think of how you might move from the darkness, to convey a bit of light in the next day or two, a reality of goodness, of clarity, of hope.

What is this gospel about?

It is about a man who is now able to see, but far more than that — he realizes a new way of living, of being — because he has encountered that light. Our response to this gospel, ultimately, must be similar: to see with new eyes, to see and respond, to live in that light.
A PRAYER AMID AN EPIDEMIC / by Karry Weber

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace.

Jesus Christ, heal us.

- Kerry Weber is an executive editor of AmericaMagazine.org.