



St. Elizabeth Church

September 25, 2020

Dear St. Elizabeth parish family,

I write you in order to provide an overview of the state of St. Elizabeth's today. Please know that I will provide a more detailed summary in a special bulletin that we will mail to all registered parishioners in anticipation of our parish patronal feast on Sunday, November 8. I will also deliver my fifth annual state of the parish homily at our Sunday Masses that weekend.

As always, the best way to keep up to date with St. E's is to sign up for our emails at <https://stelizabethmd.flocknote.com> or to check our website at <https://stelizabethchurchmd.org>.

Safe and smooth reopening: We reopened with our full Mass schedule three months ago and no cases of COVID 19 have been traced to our worship. Our attendance has slowly increased almost every week since reopening with over 600 people attending our Sunday Masses last weekend.

Earlier this week, Montgomery County officials further relaxed the pandemic restrictions on houses of worship. This change will allow us to open up the outer ends of our pews for seating, though we will continue to socially distance by using only every other pew. Remember: wear a mask and don't sit on blue tape!

If you're among those considering returning soon for the first time since our reopening, please be assured that everyone involved with our worship at St. E's has worked very hard to make our worship as safe as possible. If Sunday feels like too much at present, then please consider a weekday return. Our 7:00 a.m. weekday Mass and our 9:00 Saturday Mass usually run fewer than 20 people in attendance.

St. Elizabeth School has been open for almost a month for a combination of in-person and on-line instruction without any COVID 19 infections originating in our school. That could change any day, and we'll be ready for that first case thanks to the safe and thoroughly scientific procedures that our faculty, staff, parents, and volunteers follow daily.

Our parish office is now open for you to drop by Mondays through Fridays from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and by appointment.

Sacramental Catch-Up: Summer was extremely busy at St. E's, with 81 youth receiving confirmation at 5 separate ceremonies, 64 children making their first communion at 5 separate ceremonies and 16 weekday Masses, 10 adults becoming fully initiated Catholics, and baptisms for 10 infants and young children. Confessions are at an all-time high number for this time of year, and we began to catch up on our backlog of funerals.

Social Outreach: We have done our best to maintain our outreach to the poor and homebound during this difficult time, including the following:

- Our on-line giving option set up in March in lieu of our monthly food collection for the St. Camillus Pantry has provided the pantry \$17,491 through August.
- Our food collection So Other May Eat (SOME) resumed this month in a revised format dictated by pandemic changes at SOME.
- We have maintained our monthly commitment to our sister parish in Haiti, totaling \$16,800 since March.
- Our Dorothy Day Place Shelter meal teams never stopped providing monthly meals.
- We have continued to provide financial assistance to those referred to us by Catholic Charities.
- We have added a page on our website outlining “Resources for Assistance.”
- Carmen Boston, our Director of Healing & Service Ministries, has kept in touch with our homebound parishioners including coordinating phone calls to all of them (please contact her if you know of anyone homebound in our parish that may not be known to us).

Certain or likely cancellations: Since our reopening all parish ministries and activities have been free to resume if their leaders develop a safe plan for resumption on-line or in-person. While many have already done so and others are still evaluating their situations, several in-person ministries or activities have already determined that they cannot resume under the current conditions. Leaders of the following ministries or activities have already cancelled or delayed indefinitely for our 2020-21 program year:

- Danish Bazaar (cancelled).
- Christmas Tree Sale (cancelled).
- Joy Lunch Club (delayed indefinitely).
- Sunday Socials in the Commons (delayed indefinitely).
- Advent Giving Tree Project (cancelled – other forms of support to be explored).
- Communion to our Sick and Homebound (delayed indefinitely except emergencies).

Facilities Improvements: Our facilities have been used much less than usual over the past seven months. We have worked very hard to use this time productively for much needed repairs and improvements. In addition to countless hours of cleaning, organizing and equipping just about every inch of our campus to accommodate pandemic norms, here are a few highlights:

- New HVAC systems in four school classrooms.
- New “Outdoor Commons” between our parish office and school for outdoor meetings (new playground equipment will be installed at the opposite end of the school – the space is currently being used for outdoor classes).
- New tile floors in the school main entrance and in 2 classrooms.
- Deep cleaned all HVAC ductwork.

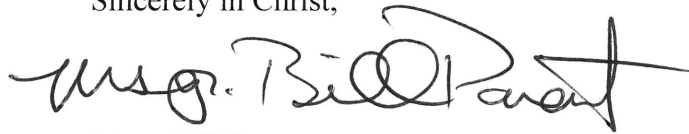
- Upgraded internet bandwidth, wireless network, and classroom equipment for on-line learning.
- Larger video monitors and better speakers in the Commons.
- New LED exterior lighting.

More is planned for the months ahead. Stay tuned for details.

Allow me to conclude this letter by thanking all of you who have been so generous to our St. E's family with your time and financial support throughout these difficult months. Though many of our volunteers understandably don't feel comfortable resuming their service yet, we are blessed by those of you who are doing more than ever before. We are also blessed by our parish employees, including our school employees, who have worked tirelessly under the most difficult circumstances I have experienced in my almost 30 years of priesthood. And we are certainly blessed by the vast majority of you who have maintained your financial support for St. E's – some of you doing so even though you haven't felt ready to return to Mass. I am continually humbled and forever grateful to be the pastor of such an amazingly generous parish community!

With kind personal regards and assurance of my prayers for you, I am

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Msgr. Bill Parent". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Msgr. Bill Parent
Pastor