

***St. Francis of Assisi Parish
Ann Arbor.***

November 11, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The news this week that Pfizer and BioNTech have developed a vaccine with 90% protection from the Covid-19 virus must certainly be welcomed as good news by all. Over the past six months as we have prayed for those affected by the virus and those who cared for them, I have also asked for your prayers for those working on a vaccine. My prayer today is that this new vaccine, the first of many, is the answer to all those prayers and heralds the beginning of a return to some form of normality. But please remember that we have some distance to go before we can finally look back and say that we have defeated the virus. Until that day, we will continue to function under current precautions and restrictions, although we will review them from time to time as permitted.

In the meantime, here at your parish we continue to look forward, planning for the future. It's hard to believe that Christmas is less than seven weeks away and that Advent begins on Nov 29. Advent and Christmas are important seasons for all Christian believers- seasons of prayer, preparation, and celebration and not just the "holidays." In the next week or so, you will receive your copy of the Parish Canticle with details of our Advent/Christmas events and liturgies. This will be our first (and hopefully our only Covid Christmas), but it will demand special arrangements and a lot of cooperation from us all.

ADVENT at SFA

Our Advent theme, chosen before the vaccine news, "*Advent- a new beginning with Christ,*" reminds us that every Church season is a new beginning- a time to refocus on and strengthen our relationship with Christ and his Church. As we begin to emerge from these challenging days, we need this new beginning more than ever.

Holy Days during Advent.

As always, we celebrate two great feasts in honor of the Blessed Mother and her role in the plan of our redemption. On Tuesday, Dec 8 we celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception- a holy day of obligation- ***Masses will be at 7pm on Monday and 9:15am and 5pm on Tuesday.*** Our Spanish speaking community is invited to a Mass at 7pm at Huron Valley Catholic School in Ypsilanti at 7pm.

This year the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe falls on Saturday, Dec 12. ***We will celebrate an outdoor bilingual Mass at 5pm with music beginning at 4:30pm.*** Please dress warmly for this Mass!

TUESDAYS of ADVENT- an extra MASS!

To assist us on the Advent journey, we will add an additional weekday Mass at 5pm on the Tuesdays of Advent. Our hope is that this will allow those on the way home from work to attend Mass as part of their Advent preparations.

Advent Confessions at St. Francis

We also plan to add additional times for Confessions. Please bear in mind that the celebration of reconciliation is a challenging one for both priest and penitent- proximity is key for confidentiality, even in this time of social distancing. For details check out the parish website <https://www.stfrancisa2.com/>

Saturday Dec 5 and 12- **2pm to 4:30pm**

Saturday Dec 19- **3:30pm to 4:30pm**

Tuesday Dec 22- **7pm to 8pm**

Saturday Dec 26- **NO CONFESSIONS**

CHRISTMAS at SFA

But the big news must be our decision to celebrate nine Masses over Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Yes, nine Masses at the following times!

Christmas Eve

- 12 noon Mass for Seniors (Aged 65 +) **No “juniors” will be admitted!**
- 2pm, 4pm, 6pm, 8pm (in Spanish) and 10pm.



Christmas Day

- 7am, 9:30am and 11:30am.

Please note that to attend Christmas Mass here at St. Francis you must first register online through our parish website: <https://www.stfrancisa2.com/> Sign in will be available very soon!

- Attendance in Church at each Mass is limited to the first 150 registered parishioners.
- **The 12 noon Mass on Christmas Eve is open to Seniors only (aged 65+).**
- Overflow for our Masses will be available in the PAC - limited to the first 100 registered parishioners.
- Masses will be live-streamed through the parish website and on a screen in the parking lot in front of the school.
- Holy Communion will be distributed **after** Masses at the front doors of the Church.
- The use of masks, hand sanitizer and social distancing is required at all Masses. No one will be admitted without a mask.
- We ask all those who have health issues to participate virtually from home or by parking in the parking lot.

- Baskets for your Christmas offerings will be available in the piazza in front of the Church.

YOUR CHRISTMAS GIFTS

As your pastor and fellow parishioner, I have been so grateful for the consistent manner in which so many of you have continued to support our parish community through these difficult times. To those who have given regularly, we are deeply thankful. To those who have not given recently can I ask you to consider a gift at this time? An easy and convenient way to contribute to your parish can be found on our website. <https://giving.parishsoft.com/App/Giving/stfrancisannarbor/>

THE NEW MINISTRY CENTER

Even with the virus, the plans for our new Ministry Center have been steadily moving ahead. With the help of our architects and the good folks at the Diocese, the building committee has fine tuned our design, and recently presented our plans to the City for approval. Again, we are grateful to all those who continue to support the project. We hope to be in a position to send the project out for contractors' bids in early 2021. Watch the bulletin and website for further information.

SHOP LOCAL

This is more of a reminder than a request- over the past few months, we have all learned to shop online- the result is that many of our local stores and businesses are hurting and some are barely managing to hold on while big corporations like Amazon have profited greatly. Can we all make an extra effort to support our local businesses by shopping locally this Christmas? By supporting them you are maintaining the fabric of our community and supporting local employment.

ONE FINAL THOUGHT!

This might be my last email before we celebrate Christmas, so, on my own behalf and on behalf of my Ministry Team can I assure you of our prayers for you and all your loved ones at this holy time. We remember especially all those who lost loved ones in the past year and are preparing to celebrate Christmas for the first time without them. Let us pray that we will all experience the great joy and hope that is found in the Christmas event and the new beginning that only Christ can give. As I said in an earlier email, what we learn for this crazy time will define us for many generations. Hopefully, we have learned that what ultimately matters is the gift of life, family/community and the promise and hope that we have in Christ. If we have learned those lessons, then perhaps we might be able to make sense of what we have endured over the past 12 months.

May the Lord continue to watch over our community and all our loved ones and may he grant us peace and security now and in the months ahead.

Fr. James