

**FATHER MELE'S STATEMENT REGARDING FAITH
IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS**

The following statement was delivered at all weekend Masses on March 14 – 15 at Saint Raphael and Sacred Heart Parishes.

Dear Parishioners and Visitors,

I want you to know I am thinking of you and praying for you and your family.

Father John, Father Steve and I are following the regular schedule for Mass assignments, so I am not able to be with everyone on this weekend. I have asked that this statement be read to you on my behalf.

The coronavirus pandemic is confusing and frightening for many people around our world right now and certainly here in our own city. We are praying for all who are already sick and especially for those who have died and for their families. We have been informed that Europe is the epicenter of the virus now and I know we here in Morningside are particularly concerned for the people of Italy where many of our parishioners have family members. I have been trying to check with parishioners and so far everyone tells me their relatives in Italy are safe. We must continue to pray for them, as I know we will.

This coronavirus crisis raises serious medical, ethical and logistical questions. It also raises additional questions for people of faith.

For my comments today, I am relying on the wisdom of statements recently made by Bishop Zubik and also what I read from other sources and in particular by two true Churchmen (Cardinal Cupich of Chicago and Father James Martin) that I want to pass on to you.

Please resist panic. This is not to say there is no reason to be concerned or that we should ignore sound advice of medical professionals and public health experts. But fear and panic are not from God. Calm and hope are. And it is possible to respond to a crisis seriously and deliberately while maintaining an inner sense of calm and hope.

God's spirit "stirs up courage and strength, consolations, inspirations and tranquility." So trust in the calm and hope, you feel. That is the voice to listen to.

Care for the sick and elderly. This pandemic may be a long haul; some of our friends may become sick. Let's all do what we can to help others, especially the elderly, disabled and isolated poor. I will be meeting with the officers of the Ladies of Charity and Saint Vincent de Paul to discuss ways that we can prudently and carefully help others. Some of the young people from our Grouping have asked if they can reach out and help too. The young want to help. I will be in touch with these volunteers. Part of the Christian tradition is caring for the sick, even at some personal cost. We also want to offer appropriate support to the many people in our parish who work in health care. We know how overwhelmed health care professionals already are. We will search for ways that we can offer our support to them.

Catholic churches around the world are closing. These are prudent and necessary measures designed to keep people healthy. But they come at some cost; for many people, this removes one of the most consoling parts of their lives – the Mass and the Eucharist. Here in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Bishop Zubik and the

Pennsylvania Bishops have not taken that measure yet. Bishop Zubik has dispensed all Catholics in our diocese from the obligation of attending Mass.

We are preparing extensive information for our website so that in the event Mass will be suppressed, people will be able to watch Mass and other Lenten devotions on TV or in other mediums. They will still be part of the Church community.

Receiving a “spiritual communion” if you cannot attend Mass in person, unites yourself with Christ in prayer and is a longstanding tradition of the Church.

Trust that God is with us. Jesus understands all the fears and worries that we all have. Go to him in prayer and trust that he hears you and is with you. **(Yesterday, after this original statement was delivered, Bishop Zubik announced that he cancelled all weekday and Sunday Masses until further notice. As a result of that announcement, our parishes will use on line meeting services when necessary; we will improvise our weekly bulletin and how it will be available; we will live stream Mass and devotions and you can access these services on our website. Hopefully by the end of today, March 16, 2020 I will be able to provide you additional information related to the recent steps I am taking for communicating with you.)**

I decided to cancel all other Lenten services that we are sponsoring on our own. The Listening Sessions are canceled. The Lenten series Metanoia and Putting on the Likeness of Christ series are canceled. Stations of the Cross are canceled although we will have the booklets available every Friday so you can come and make the Way of the Cross on your own rather than in a crowd. The Visiting Priest series is canceled although Wednesday Adoration and Evening Mass will be held unless we hear different directives from the Diocese about Mass. Both Sacred Heart and Saint Raphael churches will remain open for private prayer and devotion throughout each day. Please continue to check the website for updates which as you know continue to change day to day.

Father John or Father Steve will explain to you how I am asking every single parishioner to join our priests and pastoral staff each day for the remainder of Lent to pause at Noon to offer a special prayer that is published in this weekend's bulletin. Wherever we are at Noon each day, I hope we will take out this prayer and offer it in silence. You may even want to invite co-workers and neighbors to offer this prayer with you, while maintaining the usual safeguards from contact with one another.

Here at Saint Raphael's I have replaced the gold votive candles with the solemn violet of the penitential season of Lent. I did this intentionally so we might all light a candle asking Christ to forgive our world for the pride of so many people on earth but especially those who have hurt the poor and vulnerable but also for any form of meanness in our own neighborhoods. Like Biblical people of the ages, we all must seek to be humble and ask forgiveness of God but also each other. I pray the candles lit in our church will move all of us to love and forgive each other, the way we ask God right now to have mercy on our world.

Thank you for listening to this statement. Trust in my prayers for you. We will face the challenges ahead and without a doubt move through them together, with Christ's Help and the prayers of His Mother under the title Our Lady Undoer of Knots.