



Dear Friends,

We have reached the stage of opening our parish church in La Grange Park. Sadly, despite all the work we've done at St. Barbara, we are being required to start from scratch at St. Louise. This means we have to go through Phase I and IA (confessions, baptisms and adoration/private prayer time) before we can receive permission to enter Phase II (public Mass). The important thing with all of these services is *to show we have the people to sanitize the church after each and every service*. Without this Clean-up Team we won't receive permission to move onto Phase II. But now, the Clean-up Team will have to handle two worship sites. That means more people need to volunteer.

People, it's time to step up and provide the needed helping hands to maintain our parish churches. Unless we can show that we will take seriously the obligation of disinfecting our two churches after each and every service, we will not be given permission to keep those churches open. I don't like the idea of opening a church only to have to close it down again for lack of participation by the people. However, I may have to do just that if there aren't enough people to disinfect the churches as needed. We need to work out a system that doesn't require committing oneself to every service or even for every week. This piece is a work in progress.

I know this sounds like another version of "wear a mask and keep your distance." Well, it is. COVID-19 has dictated how we are going to live for the foreseeable future. We can grouse about it, fight it, refuse to adjust to it, but the virus will still dictate our actions. This is not "normal" and "normal" is a far-off reality right now.

I think paying attention to the Gospel for this weekend might help. Most of us get caught up in Jesus walking on the water and Peter challenging Jesus to let him do it too. But this section of Matthew's Gospel is not about walking on water, it's about the Church obeying the Lord's command.

Jesus tells the disciples to get into the boat and cross the Sea of Galilee. The ancients would have picked up on the symbolism of this scene. The boat with the disciples is the Church; crossing a body of water (chaos to the ancients) means major change; the storm is opposition to the Church accomplishing its mission.

How important for us to hear this in today's world! The globe is in a major transition to think of itself as one planet with one human race. Black Lives Matter challenges us to rethink who we are as a nation. The crashing economy challenges day-to-day life and challenges us to help those who can't help themselves. Those bailing out of the Church are challenging us to rethink the Church's mission and how to accomplish it. *Renew My Church* challenges us to rethink what it means to be a parish and what a parish's mission is in today's world. These changes crash over the sides of our boat. Like the disciples, we're afraid, struggling to steer a course through the turbulent waters of 2020.

To steer a boat through a storm as if there were calm waters, invites disaster. We can't continue to steer our boat, whether Church or parish, the same way we did before. We are disciples of Christ charged with the mission to "Go make disciples of all nations." For us in Brook Park, that means the folks on our block, the people we work with, all the people in our two Villages. Coming to church for one hour a week won't cut it anymore. And the need to step up to join one of the three essential Teams necessary for the opening of our two worship sites challenges how we view our parish and what role I choose to play in that parish.

We are a people who have suffered a death in the family. Our parishes and schools have died. The *parish* of St. Barbara and the *parish* of St. Louise no longer exists. It's hard to hear that. But it's true. We are a people grieving a loss. That's normal. Grieving forever is not good.

While in the midst of grief, we have been handed an infant – Holy Guardian Angels – to raise into an adult parish, healthy and ready to take its place in society. We need to own this newborn and nurture the growth of this new parish. Like in a marriage, traditions from both sides need to be recognized and honored. But as a new family, we, just like that couple, need to begin traditions of our own. We will have our ups and downs. But if we accept that ours is a different life than before, we can move forward in raising this new parish. Helping to keep our church buildings healthy is our responsibility. The more people take up that responsibility the better.

*Fr. Denis*