

May 14, 2020

Dear Faithful and Friends of Holy Faith,

Your support through these difficult and uncertain times of the pandemic crisis has been terrific. Those of us who have worked so hard during this season of lacking in-person worship to continue bringing you quality liturgies by live streaming the Sunday Eucharist and offering weekday Morning and Evening Prayer via Zoom have been gratified by the notes of encouragement, texts of enjoyment, and emails of appreciation that we have received expressing thanks for the efforts undertaken thus far. I also know that some cannot bring themselves to watch the Eucharist online or join in the Zoom meeting because the sense of distance and separation is too painful. It is also painful for us. We miss seeing you in the pews of Holy Faith. We miss serving with our wonderful corps of acolytes, lectors, ushers, greeters, musicians, and altar and flower guild members. We miss placing the Blessed Sacrament in the palm of your hand. Your patience has been appreciated, and I ask for your continued patience as we move into this crisis' next phase of partial reopening.

As you know, Governor Lujan Grisham has issued a new public health order effective Saturday, May 16, that permits retailers to partially reopen at 25% of capacity and houses of worship at 10% of capacity. At this time, Holy Faith will not reopen for public worship and the campus will remain closed. There are several reasons for this. Churches are not like retailers. For one, the time spent worshipping in church in one location near the same group of other people is much longer than interactions in a retail setting. The majority of churchgoers, unlike retail customers, consist of vulnerable individuals at risk to COVID-19, including those over the age of 64 and/or those with underlying health concerns such as asthma, chronic lung conditions, immune deficiency and those receiving cancer treatment, serious heart disease, diabetes, on dialysis, severe obesity, and chronic liver disease. Despite partial reopening, the instruction to stay home remains in place for these vulnerable individuals. We want to keep all of our parishioners safe, and we do not want Holy Faith to be the source of spread of the coronavirus through our parish family or to the general community.

In addition, the Diocese of the Rio Grande requires a protocol to be followed before our parish churches can open. Currently, we are completing a congregational workbook provided by the diocese last Friday evening. We are answering questions about what our experiences have been during this shutdown called Phase I in the areas of liturgy and formation, administration and finance, pastoral care, and outreach and community ministry. Your vestry will review these responses and certify them to the diocese, whereupon Bishop Hunn and the Canon to the Ordinary will contact us for a discussion of our practices. After that, we will be able to complete the congregational workbook for Phase II, expected to be available later this week, for plans on how to partially reopen at Holy Faith. There are many considerations, such as what is the church's capacity while maintaining social distancing, how do we limit attendance to that capacity, and how do we provide a high quality of worship experience for those in attendance while maintaining a high worship experience for those viewing online (because we need to continue to minister to those who do not feel it is safe to leave their homes). No partial reopening can occur before the diocese has received our vestry-approved Phase II congregational workbook and we have discussed it with the Bishop and the Canon to the Ordinary.

In a statement released today, Bishop Hunn wrote, "Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to love one another as He loves us, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Right now loving our neighbors looks like doing everything we can to keep them safe. Being careful to manage the risks to our parishioners in this moment is how we are following Jesus at this time." For a fuller explanation of the Bishop's plan for reopening, click https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zELxRHXRp_ai2tiILWN-4PE_t_kMrmq/view. To view the Bishop's response to Governor Lujan Grisham's statement regarding the plans to allow churches to reopen at 10% capacity, click <https://vimeo.com/418510695>.

So, I again ask for your patience, your understanding, and your cooperation. Until we can manage the risk of safely partially reopening, Holy Faith's ministries will continue as they have for the past several weeks, with live streaming Sunday Eucharists, weekday Morning and Evening Prayer by Zoom, Children's Chapel by Zoom, and Bible Studies and Discussion Groups by Zoom, until we can safely manage the risk of reopening. Your clergy and staff continue to work each day either from the parish office or from home, so please be in touch with any of us for whatever you need.

I reiterate my thanks to you for all your support these past few weeks. In these unprecedented times, we continue humbly to ask you to stay current in fulfilling your financial pledge to Holy Faith as you are able, be it weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Although the church is closed, Holy Faith's ministries continue, as do our fixed expenses for salaries, utilities, and maintenance. If you are able, you may want to consider increasing your giving or making a special contribution, because there will be some in our community who cannot fulfill their pledge because of job loss or other extenuating circumstances. Checks can be mailed to the parish office where they will be processed, or you can go to the Holy Faith website and donate securely online from almost any page of the website either by credit card, check/debit card, or directly from your bank account as an ACH transfer.

Finally, until we can come together again physically for worship, study, and fellowship, please continue to pray for all those affected by the coronavirus, for the repose of the souls of those who have died, and for a speedy end to this pandemic crisis.

May the Peace of the Lord be always with you.

Yours faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Robin Dodge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Fr. Robin Dodge
Rector