



THE PARISH OF MARY MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

625 UNION SCHOOL ROAD, MOUNT JOY, PA 17552 TEL: 717.653.4903

May 5, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is my prayer that all of us have been able to turn more closely to the Lord and to His holy Mother during these very difficult and unprecedented times. May those who are experiencing suffering in any way because of this pandemic find hope and consolation in the Divine Physician, Jesus Christ. Please know that I have been praying for each and every one of you every day as I offer Holy Mass. I thank those who have been keeping me and the Parish in prayer.

The current crisis has sadly been the cause of other grave concerns and situations that we as a Parish were forced to face, and then to prayerfully determine a responsible and prudent course of action for the good of the entire Parish. The dedicated members of our Parish Finance Council have been closely monitoring the financial health of the Parish, and we thank all those who so generously continued to send in their tithes or used the temporary online platform provided by the Diocese. It is with great sadness, though, that I share with you the following updates and decisions that we had to make, after much prayer and counsel.

Before this pandemic even began, the shadow of the Diocese's problems and then the bankruptcy filing were already looming over us. Because of the disaster of the Grand Jury report that was released a couple of years ago, followed then by this sad bankruptcy crisis, our Parish income and attendance, along with that of all of the other Parishes in the Diocese, were already experiencing a decline. We were also told that even though the individual Parishes are not themselves filing for bankruptcy, that still, in order to protect each of the individual Parishes from any future litigation because of these scandals, we must pay into a fund that the Diocese's bankruptcy filing will bring about. This financial crisis will soon befall the Diocese and will affect every Parish, including our own, once the bankruptcy litigation resumes.

Many Parishes across the Diocese our size and smaller had already taken steps to reduce or replace Parish staff with volunteers, and also reduce Parish programs and activities. I chose not to do any of that until we arrived closer to the conclusion of the Diocese's bankruptcy process, but then this pandemic suddenly took the world and the Church hostage.

The consequences of this pandemic are far reaching and will continue even after everything or almost everything opens up again. We have had many parishioners lose their jobs and livelihoods, as well as retired parishioners lose a bit of their retirement funds. We have been

doing our best to help parishioners with their bills and needs. I also made the decision during this time to continue paying the usual wages for our Parish staff, regardless if they are able to perform their work, until the end of June.

Our Parish Finance Council has had many discussions via teleconference, and we went back and forth as far as projections for the upcoming fiscal year and beyond, also taking into consideration the shadow of the Diocese's bankruptcy crisis and the effects it will have on our Parish in the very near future. Between the worst case scenario projection for the upcoming fiscal year, and then a relatively optimistic projection, we decided to take a chance on a middle course, but this budget version still requires a 29% reduction in Parish expenses.

Our annual budget is not as large or as complicated as the larger Parishes in our Diocese. We are considered small-medium as far as Parish size. The biggest expenses in a budget like ours are employee wages and benefits and then assessments. We have no control over the assessments that the Diocese imposes upon us, and we are expected to pay them each year. These annual assessments do not include the annual Diocesan Annual Campaign appeal, which is a separate concern. The usual assessments each year are for the Catholic High School, Catholic elementary schools that our parishioners use, the hospital and prison chaplaincies, etc.

We went back and forth from having just one employee working only part time in the Parish office, to our final version of reducing staff hours considerably and combining and removing other positions. This was a painful and difficult process, and we will be assisting them through ways that are separate from the usual Parish budget, to help compensate for their loss of pay and benefits. I ask that you please keep each member of our Parish Staff in your prayers during this difficult time of transition and change.

Beginning with the new fiscal year this July 1, 2020, the position of the Parish Secretary will be reduced from full time to part time. We then made the decision to combine the two catechizing positions of religious education director and high school youth ministry coordinator into a new position, a Coordinator of Parish Programs. This new position will also be part time. There will be an open hiring process that will begin in the next few weeks, and this position will focus on coordinating volunteers from the Parish to help lead and serve our already strong programs of education in the Catholic Faith. We also had to reduce the hours of our cleaning staff, and, moving forward, we will need many volunteers to help us in keeping the Church and the auxiliary buildings as clean as possible. Lastly, we eliminated the position of the choir director, and will be reducing the hours of the Parish organist providing musical accompaniment at weekend Masses, whenever they are able to resume publicly.

We also had to make the painful decision to cut back on all Parish program costs and expenses. While there will still be a little bit of income allocated to the main parish ministries, we are hoping for separate donations for specific projects and events so that they could still occur, and the Parish would not have to bear the burden of subsidizing these events moving forward.

Every Catholic Parish has always depended on volunteers to help further the mission and work of the Parish. We have already been blessed with an incredible presence of our Parish volunteers, who give selflessly of their time and talents and help whenever there is a need. We will need that presence of our volunteers now more than ever, as we seek to still host and provide our many wonderful Parish programs and activities, though now through more creative ways. We will need a dedicated group of volunteers to assist us in the day to day minor tasks of the Parish Office, the cleaning and care of the physical complex, and most of all, to continue to teach and live the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all of our parishioners, young and old, through dedicated teachers and classroom volunteers.

I humbly beg for your prayers for all those on our Parish staff who are affected by these changes, for the entire Parish, and for me, your Pastor. The mission of our Parish is first and foremost the worship of our Lord and God, and then secondly, the sanctification of His people. The Holy Mass and the Sacraments are, and if they are not, then they must be, our highest and first priority. As long as this Parish stands, the Holy Mass will be offered and the Sacraments will be dispensed. The teaching of the Faith then follows, and that will still happen, even in the midst of these changes and cutbacks. We will still have Parish programs and activities for all of our parishioners of all ages. We will just need to explore new ways of providing them and helping others to be involved and to offer their time and talents.

It is indeed a trying and sad time, but the grace of our God still calls us to be His faithful disciples, in season and out of season, in good times and in bad. We have been blessed these last number of years to enjoy a time of plenty. The time of fasting and of loss is upon many of us right now, and it is incumbent upon all of us to be as responsible and as prudent as we can with the resources and the gifts that have been entrusted to us. Mary Mother of the Church Parish will still be here. Maybe a little smaller, a little poorer, but we will still be here. A number of Parishes in our Diocese will sadly not be able to confidently say that, and will, God forbid, either close their doors or merge with a neighboring Parish. But for now, and if we do what needs to be done, as painful as it may be, we can say that our Parish will still be here. Let us work together to still build up God's Kingdom here at our Parish. May the Lord bless you and protect you always, and may Our Lady, His holy Mother and the Mother of the Church, pray for us and for our Parish. Please stay safe, and may God be with us always.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'The Reverend Father Pang J. S. Tcheou', written in a cursive style.

The Reverend Father Pang J. S. Tcheou
Pastor