

26 March 2023

*“We exist to **encourage, inform, and support** the faith journey of all who have come to UAF with a background in the Catholic tradition.”*

Fr Ross called for a town hall meeting on Sunday, March 26th since there have been no parish council meetings since he became pastor of St Mark University Parish last June. St. Mark members have been expressing their concerns to the parish administrator. This forum gave all an opportunity to hear and learn. Longtime members of the parish are concerned about:

- Celebrating Sunday Mass on campus at multiple times as in prior decades when there was a full time pastor and campus chaplain.
- Losing the feeling of community
- And having a greater presence for students on campus who may not choose to stray far from campus.

Fr. Ross Tozzi explained the sacred worship space at Sacred Heart Cathedral was provided when UAF removed outside groups from campus due to COVID. We are extremely blessed in the city to have multiple options for Mass. Throughout the rest of the diocese, more than half of the parish do not have Mass on a given weekend. If a deacon or lay presider is trained, then the parish may have a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest.

While church attendance and collections declined significantly during the pandemic throughout the country, Saint Mark’s 5:30 pm Mass at SHC saw an increase in both attendance of students and non-students.

Given the scarcity of priests in the rural areas of the diocese, there is no current plan to return to weekend Mass on campus. Students meet weekly for a daily Mass on campus. It was a year before UAF provided students with space on campus at the Lathrop Dorm. The time is Thursday at noon but it varies from semester to semester based on the students schedules and preferences.

Students of the Catholic Student Association (CSA) have been meeting the last three semesters for weekly mass and meetings. Students are thankful for the weekly Mass and appreciate the sacred space offered in area churches on weekends. The CSA meetings this year have focused on instruction in the faith to assist students and UAF staff interested in full initiation in the church. CSA member Leo Kennedy has prepared for coming fully into the church at the Easter Vigil.

Fr Ross would like to continue the town hall meetings on a monthly basis to keep ideas flowing on how to help students and remain a community. The next meeting will be on Divine Mercy Sunday – April 16th after the 5:30 PM Mass. Please think and pray about ideas on how to “encourage, inform, and support” our UAF students. Can we begin with starting our end of the month “birthday/anniversary” socials again?

The spring semester last day of instruction is coming up May 1st.

