



ST. MARK UNIVERSITY CATHOLIC PARISH

The Catholic Community of University of Alaska Fairbanks

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The past year for our parish has been one of immense change. The last six months have been especially unusual. As a parish, it began by being asked to leave our home at UAF when administration decided to shut down campus in early March. We adapted and moved to Sacred Heart Cathedral. After a very brief period of time at Sacred Heart, the governor ordered mandatory shelter in place mandates shuttering the doors of our churches. Again, we adapted by celebrating Mass online, adoring the Blessed Sacrament through the chapel window at the chancery office and eventually, gathering again in parking lots for worship. By June, we were finally allowed back into the church and here we have remained for the summer socially distancing and masking ourselves for each other's safety...but we are together again as a community of faith.

I want to express a heartfelt thank you to all of you for your patience, adaptability and support over the last six months. Our little parish has continued to weather the storm of chaos and uncertainty and that is because of the faithfulness that all of you have shown. Pope Francis reminded us all during his extraordinary *urbi et orbi* reflection, "We have an anchor: by his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross we have been redeemed. We have hope: by his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing can separate us from his redeeming love." As long as we continue to keep our focus on the only One who matters, there is nothing that can shake our faith.

I wish I could write to you and tell you that as students prepare to return to UAF for the fall semester that we, too, would be returning to campus. Mary Pat has been in regular communication with university administration and, unfortunately, at this time the mitigation plan that is in place on campus will not allow us to gather in Murie Auditorium to celebrate Mass. We expect this to last through at least the fall semester. So, this means two things for us as a community. First, we will continue to celebrate Mass at the usual time of 5:30 pm at Sacred Heart Cathedral until further notice. Second, we as a parish community, originally founded to reach out to Catholic college students, need to get creative to fulfill our parish mission. I would ask all of you to prayerfully consider how we can engage the student population and the young adults of the Fairbanks area in new and unique ways to support and strengthen them in their faith. While we may not occupy the same space that we once did or have the same access to campus facilities to be a physical presence on campus, I am confident that we can still be a shining light of the Catholic faith for our students and the greater Fairbanks community.

May God continue to watch over and bless our students and our parish. May our patron, St. Mark, continue to be a shining example of steadfast faith for all of us to follow in these times of uncertainty and change.

Fr. Robert Fath, JCL

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Diocese of Fairbanks

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