

# The Church of Saint Leo the Great

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Dear parishioners of St. Leo the Great parish,

I want to thank you for your admirable stewardship during the three months of the Covid-19 pandemic when our parish church was closed. At the beginning of April, I made an appeal to all our parishioners to remember the parish offertory and do what they could to continue the flow of income to pay the bills and salaries as without a Sunday offertory collection there would be little other income for our operating expenses. You, our parishioners, were both generous and attentive to this reality and there was a steady stream of people remembering the parish financial needs realized in their weekly drop off of offertory envelopes in the parish mailbox. Some parishioners even made larger than usual contributions. These efforts resulted in our financial security and helped us to stay ahead of the monthly invoices. For our part, we made every effort to keep the utility costs down to a bare minimum throughout this time. Again, thank you.

I recognize as well that many of our parishioners were or possibly are facing financial hardships, job losses or an uncertain future and it is, therefore, understandable that money might be tight at this time. Giving to God is always seen by God Himself above all others and it is to Him, therefore, that we make an account of ourselves and our giving as He knows our hearts. If we give God of our first fruits the blessings come from Him along with the knowledge that we have done our best. May God bless you in your giving.

A month ago we re-opened our parish church along with most parishes throughout the Archdiocese. Unfortunately, we have seen a great reduction in the number of parishioners and families attending the Sunday Masses and we are seeing a considerable drop in parish revenue at a time when re-opening means the return of operating expenses. I have urged parishioners who are not using *Pre-Authorized Giving* to consider doing so now as this helps greatly in providing a more steady and regular monthly income to your parish, even and perhaps especially during the summer months when many are away.

The times in which we live are strange and confusing and therefore, all the more do we need to cling to Christ, the sacramental life, the gift of the Mass and the Eucharist in the feeding of our souls in the good things of God. I urge our parishioners who are able to come to Mass but may be experiencing fear of doing so, to return. We miss you. It is not Christ's desire that anything, yes anything, should stand between us and Him in the great mandate of His Church in Word and Sacrament. There just is no substitute for the Mass and receiving Holy Communion. "Watching" Mass on television just doesn't come anywhere close to receiving Jesus in Holy Communion which is the Bread of Angels and the spiritual sustenance Christ knows we need – that's why He gave us the Eucharist. If you are staying away from Mass due to fear, pray for God's guidance and help and know that the parish has taken every precaution to safely hold Mass at weekday and the weekend Masses.

In many ways your parish church is far safer than other public buildings as people enter the church, are seated in one place for the duration of the Mass and make no physical contact whatsoever with others until they are safely in their home once again. God's House, the church, is always the safest place on earth, the refuge for the sinner and the seeker, and the home of our living faith in Jesus Christ.

The following are just some of the changes we have made and the precautions we are taking to ensure your health safety at all times while at Mass.

- **Face Masks** are recommended by the Durham Region Health Unit but not mandatory.
- **Seating Capacity Reduced:** Our parish seating capacity is 696 people but we have arranged the seating so that we can accommodate between 130 and a maximum of 180 parishioners in order to maintain at all times the necessary six-foot distancing.
- All parishioners are directed by *Care Associates* (trained parish volunteers) to **hand sanitize** as soon as they enter the church doors.
- *Care Associates* provide **assistance with seating** so that worshippers are spread out in the seating areas.
- **Every second pew is closed** to provide the necessary required six-foot distancing in your pew.
- **There is no singing** throughout the Mass to safeguard against the projection of germs to others.
- **Helpful lines on the floor** throughout the church indicate the traffic flow of parishioners for Communion as well as six-foot distancing markers on the floor (which are actually eight feet apart).
- **Communion is safely distributed** in such a way that no hand ever touches your hand, face masks may be left on until you have received Communion, (in your hand only) and once received, your mask can be placed on your face again.
- **Parishioners exit their pews row by row** at the end of Mass beginning at the back of the church to ensure safe distancing at all times.
- **The Care Associates wash and disinfect every pew, kneeler and surface** possibly touched during the Mass as soon as Mass is over.

In the Bible, the phrase "Do Not Be Afraid" is found 365 times – that's every day of your life. While many are afraid these days, every Christian who has firmly placed their hope and faith and love in God has nothing to fear. Christ is our protection, the Spirit our guide, the Father in command of all things. And Our Blessed Mother is our great intercessor and help as we go to her Immaculate Heart like children to their mother. Pray the Rosary every day – it only takes 15-minutes. Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet every day – it only takes 6-minutes. Pray from your heart for the world, our leaders, the Church, our clergy, our families, our parish and ourselves. Christ hears and answers all our prayers according to His steadfast, reliable, unfolding and perfect will. Place your life and all your cares in Him.

May God bless you and keep each one of you.

In Christ,

Fr. Charles T. Forget, Pastor