

May 17, 2021

Dear treasured member of SJN,

I remember many times the anticipation of big events in my life like graduations and even the big holidays like Christmas and Easter. When we were young it seemed like it took forever for them to arrive and they were over in a flash.

In some ways the pandemic is like that for us. We have been anticipating the end of the pandemic and it has seemed like it is taking a long time to arrive. It's not completely over yet, if it will ever be, but at least it seems that we are in a better place. On Friday May 14, 2021 our governor Roy Cooper and our Bishop Peter Jugis in a matter of a few moments of time removed many of the restrictions we have been following to stay safe

I feel like I'm about ready to burst so much is beginning to happen so fast. Perhaps you feel the same. There is so much energy and faith and *excitement* around the parish for us to put this pandemic behind us. We're like a child in anticipation of those big celebrations.

So let's get right to it. As you may know, Bishop Jugis has lifted his dispensation from attending Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation beginning Sunday May 23rd, Pentecost Sunday. There are some exceptions and the dispensation remains for some in a high risk category. This also means we are returning to our traditional mass schedule at SJN (Sat. 5pm and Sun. 8, 9:30 and 11:00 am 12:30 Spanish and 5 pm). As quickly as the pandemic came upon us last year, it seems to be moving away now at the same speed. So let's talk about how we're going to come together, parents and children, neighbors and strangers and sing and smile and pray and rejoice and praise God for everything he has done for us.

The mask requirements and social distancing requirements have been lifted. However, we will continue to encourage safe practices. Those who have a higher risk of contracting the virus may continue to wear a mask and all are encourage to do so. To accommodate those who would like to continue to distance themselves socially we will have areas in the sanctuary marked for social distancing. Hand sanitizer will still be provided at entrance doors and we encourage its use. Mass will be live streamed to our parish Facebook and YouTube pages and as well as to the parish hall as needed. We will continue to monitor and follow the recommendations of our healthcare professionals.

We are also beginning to plan how **commemorate this experience** as a parish, and how we will remember the souls who died. Because there's a need for that as well, no less urgent and no less important to our parish community than a celebration.

In a few weeks, I will ask your opinion on how we should move forward. I am asking you to participate in a brief survey, and I hope to be flooded with amazing responses containing heartfelt and creative ideas.

A sheer volume of responses will tell me that I'm not the only one who has been waiting for the chance to move forward in faith.

I know that we're not completely out of the woods. I know we need to remain cautious, and we need to listen to our local health officials. We will continue to follow their recommendations and have safety precautions available for your safety. But I also know that we're close enough that we can start planning for the future of our parish. And let me tell you, **our parish will be the place to be this year.** We are coming out of this experience stronger than ever before.

We are planning to have a parish celebration. And mark your calendars for our Celebration Weekend on October 2, 2021 at Sonfest. It's going to be a celebration like we haven't seen in ages.

Yes, things can always change, but our parish leaders feel this is a prudent, realistic timeline. I agree. (We can adjust our timeline if necessary.) For now, let's plan ahead and work together and pray together to make it happen.

I can't wait to see you, and everyone else, together as a parish family again.

Gratefully in Christ,



Fr. John Starczewski
Pastor St. John Neumann Catholic Church