

## Our Lady of Hope Catholic Church

46639 Algonkian Parkway  
Potomac Falls, VA 20165  
(703) 433-6770

August 30, 2020

Dear Parishioners of Our Lady of Hope Parish,

As we enter the month of September, the coronavirus is still very much with us. More than 5.9 million of our countrymen have contracted the virus. Of these, more than 180,000 have died. Undoubtedly, some of us know friends or relatives who have had or have the virus. The mother of a brother priest died of the virus. And, just last week, four priests in one of our diocesan parishes have been in quarantine because one of them tested positive. As a result, all daily Masses and confessions were suspended in that parish.

We all know that because of the danger of the virus, restrictions have been placed on the way people interact in almost every area of our lives. Friends can't get together as easily as we would like. What we took for granted in the past has no longer been the case. And this has had tremendous effects on the economy. Many people have had to make adjustments in the way they work. Some have been laid off or furloughed from their jobs. The unemployment rate and requests for unemployment assistance have been at historic highs.

It is no wonder that many, if not all of us, are under stress. And our faith in God and his providence can be challenged. We may ask: where is God in all of this? Dear brothers and sisters, I assure you that he is with us every day, every moment of every day. It is up to us to turn to him in our doubts, to tell him of our fears and anxieties, and to receive from him the grace – his love and assurance – *to keep going*. Each day, *we must turn to the Lord*, the Divine Mercy, and say, "Jesus, I trust in you."

Much light shines in these troubled days. Our dedicated and enthusiastic administrators and faculty are opening our parish school to boys and girls eager to get back in the classroom. I am very grateful to Mrs. Pittman, our principal, and our teachers who have met the numerous challenges to make our school a safe environment for our children to learn.

We also welcome back students to our religious education program. Like our parish school, the RE program is making available both in person and on-line learning. Mrs. Jackie Regan and Mrs. Lisa Orosa have spent many hours devising a program based on solid instruction in an environment that is safe for our children. I express my thanks to Jackie, Lisa, and the cadre of volunteer catechists without whom we could not offer this program.

Both of these as well as other programs run by our parish organizations are supported by the diligent work of our facilities and maintenance staff. I am grateful to our facilities manager Alfonso Pena, and all who work with him, for keeping the church, offices, and school especially clean during this time of COVID 19.

Our education programs as well as our parish office are required to adhere to the protocols for health and safety given in the new diocesan COVID-19 Handbook. The Handbook represents the mandates legislated by the Commonwealth of Virginia in July for all employers during the pandemic. The mandates are contained in the Virginia Emergency Temporary Standard ([tinyurl.com/16VAC25-220](http://tinyurl.com/16VAC25-220)). These mandates are occupational standards like OSHA, which all employers must follow and therefore apply to parishes and schools. All staff in our parish office and school will receive a copy of the COVID-19 Handbook and undergo training in the mandates by September 25<sup>th</sup>. Staff and volunteers in our RE Program must adhere to guidance given by the

Diocesan Office of Faith Formation. The staff and volunteers in our office and school take these mandates very seriously. I ask your prayers as we already have begun to implement them.

Another light shining in the darkness of our times has been our liturgies. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, we like all diocesan parishes, entered Phase III of restoring public worship in our church. I wish to take this opportunity to review the guidelines given by the Diocese for the present time.

First of all, because of the corona virus pandemic, Bishop Burbidge has lifted the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. No lay Catholic is required to attend Mass on Sunday. And indeed, if one feels sick in any way, he or she should NOT come to Church.

If you or those for whom you care are “vulnerable” to infection or the serious effects of coronavirus, *please avoid gatherings of the general public*. This includes Mass. Those who are “vulnerable” are over the age of 65, have existing heart or lung conditions, have diabetes, and/or are otherwise immuno-compromised.

Secondly, those coming to Church are expected to wear a cloth face covering or disposable face mask. Please bring your own.

Thirdly, the Diocese expects that we practice social distancing. Of course, families may sit together. However families should maintain a six foot distance from others.

Related to social distancing, the Diocese prohibits holding hands during the Lord’s Prayer. And we continue to omit the sign of peace.

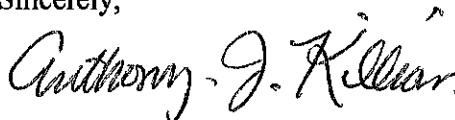
With regard to Holy Communion, all present who are in a state of grace may receive Communion. Those who have health concerns are not obliged. All are encouraged to disinfect their hands immediately before receiving Communion. To do this, it would be helpful to bring a small bottle of hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

The diocese says that “you retain the right to decide how to receive, whether on the tongue or in the hand.” But then it immediately goes on to add: “Please prayerfully consider temporarily receiving reverently in the hand. The Diocese encourages each person to pray about his or her own decision regarding reception of Communion.” The message here, as I read it, is if at all possible receive Communion in the hand.

Please know that ministers are encouraged to disinfect their hands immediately after each and every communicant who receives on the tongue, even if no physical contact has occurred. Ministers are also encouraged to disinfect their hands immediately if accidental contact is made with a communicant’s hand.

In summary then, as your pastor, I am asking that all who come to Church wear masks, practice social distancing, and if at all possible receive Holy Communion in the hand. Why would we do these things? The answer is simple: for love of God and one another. And it’s love that is going to see us through these challenging times. May God bless you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony J. Killian". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Father Killian