Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It’s been over five months since we began to experience the Coronavirus pandemic’s impact here in our diocese. Our lives are changed, and as we work to care for our families and communities, uncertainty and pandemic restrictions can start to weigh on us. The pandemic has added anxiety to our plans, caused daily disarray for most, and even brought tragedy to many families. Like so many of us, I long for life to be as it was. Even so, I want to encourage all of us not to let despair win the day. I invite you to join me. Let us draw near to Jesus, join our suffering to His, and remember to care for each other and ask for the help we need. Let us carry this cross prayerfully and remember that Jesus bears the troubles of each and every one of us with His own blessed cross. He is very close to us in our worries, weariness, sickness, and loss. Even as we pray for a cure to the pandemic and struggle to stay strong in faith, we don’t do it alone. Pray for the grace to persevere and trust in the unconditional love of Christ.

Let’s take steps to manifest our faith and express our hope in Jesus through charity towards friends and strangers, especially the people God has placed in our lives. We can pay extra attention to who He is sending; family, friends, coworkers, people in the grocery store, at the gas station - perhaps when we least expect it. Let’s greet the worry and tension of this time with love and concern for our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need.

Trusting in Jesus, we can also pray, “If it is your will that this continues, help me to accept it and make the best of the good you have given me.” In surrendering the outcome, we can better see the good, and in times of trial, we should seek it out. Enjoy nature. Get out and experience Montana. God has gifted us such a beautiful home.

Take good care of yourself. Take special care of your own mental and emotional health. We’re made for each other, to see each other’s faces and enjoy the gift of sharing our lives. Isolation and stress can take a toll on trigger points in our hearts and minds – more so if we struggled in those places before the pandemic. Don’t suffer alone if you are hurting. Please reach out to a family member or a medical professional and remember that we are in this together as part of the body of Christ. None of us are alone.

In Christ,

Bishop Austin A. Vetter
Parishes Adapt During Pandemic
Dan Bartleson, Communications Services Director

On March 17, Bishop Vetter made the tough call to suspend the celebration of public Masses in the Diocese of Helena. As the Coronavirus case count grew, Governor Bullock’s safety directives closed many businesses and prohibited almost all public gatherings in Montana. Suspension of Masses, and dispensation from the obligation to go, opened a chasm in the hearts of Catholics in our diocese whose faith is rooted, nurtured and blossoms through parish life. We joined countless Catholic sisters and brothers around the world who could not come together as faith communities or physically receive the Eucharist. Priests and parish staff needed to help communities in a health crisis but could not physically come together for comfort and support.

Butte Catholic Community North
Fr. Patrick Beretta, at Butte’s St. Patrick and Immaculate Conception parishes, heard first-hand from family about the intensity of the outbreak in Europe. The rate at which the virus spread and national shutdowns in France and Italy were sobering. He said, “When it came here, if things started to unravel, it could be very bad.” On St. Patrick’s Day, during his last public Mass before the suspension, Fr. Patrick placed the entire Butte deanery under St. Patrick’s protection. Locally, the Montana Standard ran the dedication on the front page. Fr. Patrick then asked community leaders in Butte for help keeping the community calm and grounded in case things got worse. He initiated “Global Crisis, Local Heroes,” a program honoring essential workers for their bravery and service during the pandemic. Out of hundreds of nominations, a final ten local heroes received one thousand dollars to spend in the community. Fr. Patrick said, “It was important in a community starving for a comforting and calming message to see people with ordinary jobs doing extraordinary things in the community.”

KBOW radio invited Fr. Patrick to deliver daily messages where he encouraged calm and responsible actions. He asked listeners to care for one another, refrain from hoarding, and be aware of those most vulnerable to the virus. Pastoral Assistant, Seaneen Prendergast, assembled and managed the equipment so that Mass could be broadcast live to the web and over the radio. The broadcasts of Mass and Fr. Patrick’s messages sparked an overwhelmingly positive response from parishioners and people who tuned in from afar. Letters and calls poured in. Prendergast said, “(we) Stayed connected as a parish from the very beginning and continue to stay close, including the new members of our parish family.”

St. Mary Catholic Community, Helena
Suspension of public Mass led Fr. Richard Francesco to assemble an outreach team of volunteers and essential parish staff. They took the initiative to communicate via phone calls, e-mails, texts, and postcards. They worked to connect with each parishioner with particular concern for those vulnerable to isolation or poor health. Fr. Richard expanded the weekly bulletin to address the pandemic, encourage safety and good health, foster charity under challenging times, and provide pastoral connection and care. His letters, with similar messages, were sent and published in the Independent Record newspaper. He recorded video messages for parishioners on his phone during Holy Week. On the second Sunday of Easter, Mass was attended virtually for the first time.

Experimenting with online business meeting tools, outreach workers felt one might work for Mass. It was a success. Fr. Richard said, “During the first few weeks, I was in the church alone with my trusty cell phone moving among four different locations while all the liturgical ministers were in their homes. It worked well, and it gave parishioners the opportunity to see one another!” As outreach continued, the loan of a Livestream system improved the quality for remote worshippers. At the prospect of phased reopening, an online poll revealed that parishioners were apprehensive about the risks of gathering for public Mass. This sense, combined with the preparation time needed, meant limited public Masses began on the Feast of the Ascension (Memorial Day Weekend).

One of the signs of faith during the pandemic at St. Mary is that the ministry in support of the needy has remained fully funded throughout. Fr. Francesco said, “Parishioners have demonstrated their understanding of the gospel mandate to love one another. They understand that they are their brother’s keeper. They trust in Jesus’ instruction, ‘Do not be afraid.’”

Pandemic “Normal”
Both Fr. Patrick and Fr. Richard upgraded their Livestream equipment for Masses and will continue broadcasting. Each parish saw an initial drop in tithe in March but continue to recover as engagement grows. Both priests repeatedly expressed gratitude for their parishioners’ tremendous encouragement, for caring for one another, writing letters, calling and volunteering, and especially for their prayerful and thoughtful actions during this difficult time.

The good people in all of our parishes, schools, hospitals and civic organizations continue to give of themselves above and beyond their call to serve. Let us continue to pray for one another, stay connected and help our most vulnerable as we journey with Christ through the global Coronavirus pandemic.
Sisters on the Frontlines: Women Religious Recieve Grants for Coronavirus Relief

Cody Tredik, Communications Services

Through their new initiative “Sisters on the Frontlines”, Catholic Extension has given seven Women Religious in the Diocese of Helena $1,000 each to be used for Coronavirus relief.

The grant program began in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic with one goal in mind: to give $1,000 to 1,000 Catholic Sisters around the country in order to ease the toll of the pandemic on families, especially those on the margins of our communities. All funding must be used for direct assistance to people in their communities, but each Sister is free to choose where to offer it.

“She cried tears of joy when she received the gift,” Sr. Hillary and Sr. Schnell said. “She said that she would use it to pay her debts. We were so happy to represent Catholic Extension’s Sisters on the Frontlines to present this conscientious and grateful mother and her family with this gift.”

The second is another mother raising her three biological children alongside being the legal guardian for six others from two different families. She is working hard to blend the three families and nurture the education and development of each child. At the time the Sisters received the grant, this mom was considering cancelling her internet service because it was becoming too expensive.

“She know that in this time of Covid-19 and distance learning accessibility to the internet is a necessary for children. Online learning would be very advantageous option for this family because a couple of the children experience chronic health issues.” The funds provided helped to extend internet service for the family so the children could access their education, as well as videos fostering spiritual development such as Legendary Lodge’s Online Summer Ministry Program.

Sr. Mary Jo Quinn, SCL of Blessed Trinity Parish in Missoula offered $1,000 to a family with four small children. Both parents lost their jobs, and subsequently, their apartment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sr. Quinn worked with them when they became guests of Family Promise of Missoula, and organization she has played an integral part in for many years.

“During their residence at Family Promise, the mother has completed CNA training and has found a new job, and the father will begin college in the fall.

continued on next page
Sisters on Frontlines Cont.

With this grant, they will be able to get into a new home soon and maintain their residence through the uncertainty of the continuing pandemic,” Sr. Quinn said. “It is a source of gratitude for me to continue the good work of Catholic Extension in Missoula.”

Sr. Margaret Hogan, SCL of St. Francis of Assisi in Hamilton serves families across the Bitterroot Valley. She chose to give her funds to two young families whose newborns are struggling with complications. Both young ones are in hospitals receiving care, but due to the pandemic, only one parent is allowed to be inside at a time. This means that both families have had to do extensive travelling back and forth from the hospital, and one sibling has only gotten to meet their new baby sister through the window.

“My heart was filled with gratitude, and I know the grant will bless both families and these two beautiful babies will be helped in some way,” Sr. Hogan said. “I felt deeply in my own heart the desire to offer the assistance to them since they were remarkable in their care for their families. My experience was one that certainly touched me and gave me great hope.”

Sr. Judy Lund, OP of St. Matthew’s in Kalispell saw a need at an 8-bedroom non-profit home for homeless high school students. Her grant allowed the organization to provide personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies, and support staffing needs.

“I’m grateful for this generous donation. These supplies will help keep these students and staff protected for the coming year,” Sr. Lund said.

In addition to the Religious mentioned, the grant was also given to Sr. Lin Marie Sayatovic, SCL in Anaconda, and Sr. Maria Orozco, SCL in Missoula.

“We are grateful to Catholic Extension for their quick and cooperative ministry. We’re also deeply indebted to the Women Religious in our Diocese, Seipp said. “We are already seeing the ripple effects of this initiative. These women bring so much goodness to our families and communities, and I know that we will continue to see the effects of their goodness for many years to come.”

As campus ministries launch amid Coronavirus adjustments and an uncertain academic year, some help has arrived in the form of FOCUS teams. At Bishop Vetter’s invitation, a group of four young adults from the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) will serve campus ministry at Christ the King Parish in Missoula (University of Montana) and at Carroll College in Helena.

According to Andy Foy, FOCUS team leader at Christ the King, the FOCUS mission is simple; “...to demonstrate the love of Christ (and) tell students that they are loved as a child of God and encourage them to live out that identity.” This emphasis on Christian friendship and discipleship often takes place in small group activities and bible studies. The mission has powerful implications for society as it dovetails with the long-term vision for campus ministry. Deidre Casey, the Women’s Campus Minister at Carroll, said, “Students’ time at Carroll, academically and spiritually, helps them discover who they are. As they do, it’s not the end of their faith experience. It’s a time of going deeper and being prepared for the rest of their lives.”

With large gatherings and events limited or canceled due to the Coronavirus, the FOCUS teams will begin the year alongside peer ministers and ministry leaders getting to know students and inviting them into a community of faith. Observing health precautions, this could include liturgy, small groups, music, hospitality, prayer, bible studies, and a variety of ministries. Fr. Kirby Longo, pastor at Christ the King feels FOCUS’s smaller-scale approach is good timing, “The small discipleship groups and individual or one-on-one approach are a great supplement to retreats and mission trips. This year, the things teams do are the only things that may be possible with the Coronavirus.”

For the campus ministries at Carroll College and Christ the King, FOCUS’s mission and the presence of teams would be a welcome help in any year. This year, however, it is strong evidence of God’s providence.
Diocese Welcomes Three New Seminarians
Cody Tredik, Communications Services

Bishop Austin Vetter and the Diocese of Helena proudly welcomes three new men who will begin their studies at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver: John Cooney, Riley Helgoe, and Brett Rotz.

John Cooney grew up in Colbert, Wash. the oldest of four brothers and sisters. Attending Gonzaga Preparatory School introduced him to the Catholic faith and eventually led him to Carroll College where he was received into the Church. He loves running, reading, writing, and fishing. “My goal is to enter into this year as open and receptive as possible,” he said. “I certainly have nerves, but ultimately I’m excited to spend a year with the Lord and see what He has to reveal to me.”

Riley Helgoe also began his journey to seminary with conversion. The youngest of four siblings, Riley grew up in the Lutheran church in Eau Claire, Wis., and converted while attending the University of Montana at the encouragement of his mother, who had returned to her Catholic roots a few years before. His discernment into seminary continued over the next couple of years through conversations with a spiritual director, visits to seminaries and religious orders, and a lot of prayer. "I’m excited,“ he said. “I’ve been thinking and praying about it for the last five years, talking to people, learning more, and while it’s a big step, it feels natural. I’m ready to go.”

Brett Rotz hails from Rathdrum, Idaho. After graduating from Lakeland High School in 2016, he attended Carroll College, which his two older sisters also call their alma mater.

Brett encountered the call to priesthood through close friendships and mentors, such as late night conversations in the Chapel at Legendary Lodge. This camaraderie, and some good dialogue with Fr. Marc Lenneman, Carroll’s Chaplain and the Diocesan Vocations Director, led him into seminary this fall. He enjoys road biking, hiking, and trying to grill the perfect steak.

“There’s still a lingering question of: am I ready? But thankfully God has been super gentle, bringing me along with a lot of little yeses. There’s a lot of confidence for me in that amidst the uncertainty,” he said.

The three men made their way to Denver on Aug. 13 to begin their Spirituality Year, a year of laying the foundations for their future seminarian studies and eventual priestly life.

If you want to learn more about them, and their thoughts on discernment and vocation, check out our more detailed video interview with them at: www.diocesehelena.org/vocations/seminarians. Please continue to keep them, and all of our seminarians, in your prayers throughout their studies.

Mass Livestreams During COVID-19 Pandemic

Throughout the quarantine and beyond, the diocesan Communications Department has livestreamed Mass every day from the Cathedral of St. Helena, striving to bring the Mass to all who were sheltering-in-place, and now to those who are at-risk or may not yet feel comfortable returning. Over 23 weeks, just over 150 Masses have been streamed on the Diocese of Helena website and YouTube channel, with over 150,000 views all together, with 10,183 people tuning in to Easter Sunday Mass.

Comments from the faithful have been incredibly encouraging. Some of them include:

“Thank you, Bishop Vetter, Msgr. O’Neill, Fr. Lenenman, and all others on the altar for the extraordinary effort you went to shepherd your flock where they are. This felt like I had a personal Mass in my own house. Thank God for the technology, priests, and health care workers.”

“Greetings from WA! Thank you for sharing for sharing Mass in Montana with us. Wonderful service!! God bless you all!!”

“THANK YOU! The quality of the stream was absolutely impressive. I could hear and see better than when I am in person.”

Thank you to all who have reached out with compliments and suggestions. Mass livestreams will continue this fall under the management of the Cathedral of St. Helena, allowing our Communications staff to return to work on their usual responsibilities and projects. The specific date and timing of the transition has livestreamed Mass every day. The specific date and timing of the transition will be announced on our website and social media pages.

Support Youth & Young Adult Ministry

Online Raffle for a 2020 Subaru Ascent!

Buy now at: www.frontlineraffle.com/SonlightCelebration

Join Bishop Vetter for the Son Light Online Celebration Oct. 9th at 7:00 pm on www.diocesehelena.org

The Foundation for the Diocese of Helena, Inc. Board of Trustees is currently accepting applications for the position of Executive Director. Please visit www.fdoh.org for information on the position and how to apply. Applications will be accepted through October 31, 2020.
Prayer for Vocations

Father, you call each one of us by name and ask us to follow you.

Bless your church by raising up dedicated and generous leaders from our families and friends who will serve your people as Sisters, Priests, Brothers, Deacons, and Lay Ministers.

Inspire us as we grow to know you, and open our hearts to hear your call. We ask this in Jesus’ name.

Amen.