



**ST. FRANCIS XAVIER**  
MISSOULA'S JESUIT PARISH

Dear Sisters and Brothers of St. Francis Xavier,

In the early days of the Church, St. Paul wrote to his friends in the community at Philippi with these words: “I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” Today, we are not separated by distance or imprisonment, as Paul was, but by the need to care for the needs of others—especially our most vulnerable—in this time of coronavirus. Yet, for me, the sentiment is the same: I give thanks for you, I pray for you, and I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. I know the hardships of this separation, and the fear and anxiety that may be with each of us in these days of “social distancing”. And yet, I also know that the love of God, which makes us the Body of Christ in this world is not distant from any of us, but weaves us together with faith and hope, with courage and constancy.

Today, in our world, the temptations to despair and fear are many. The coronavirus, or even more, our anxiety over the coronavirus, seeks to undermine our sense of ourselves and our place in the universe. In some ways, perhaps, this is a gift, since too often our sense of ourselves lacks truth and perspective. Like Lent, this terrible pandemic may strip away our hubris and remind us that we are part of a vast universe beyond our control. But in a deeper sense, this fear—like all fear—is a lie, arising from the enemy of our human nature. For the universe, from the farthest galaxy to the smallest virus, is wondrous and awesome, but so, too, are we. And we are beloved of God, whose Spirit still holds all the universe as one. To be beloved in this way is not to say we may not be stricken, but to recall that we are never forgotten, never released from a love even greater than the universe in which we live and move and have our being. This is what led Ignatius to tears, what gives us hope in the midst of disease and uncertainty: the wisdom that makes us humble in awe and confident in an infinity of love.

I do not know how long this pandemic may last, nor how long until we might again be able to be together around the Eucharistic table, but we on the Parish staff will still be ministering as we can—with broadcast Mass, with increased audio content, with Sacramental presence by anointing, with the Church open for private prayers daily, and especially with our prayers.

We are here if you want to talk—feel free to reach on-line [JCarver@sfxmissoula.org](mailto:JCarver@sfxmissoula.org) or by phone 406-542-0321 if you need us.

This time of trial, this Lent we did not seek but which somehow found us, will pass, and hopefully we will be stronger for it—more aware of what matters and of the abiding grace in our community. But even as we are not able to share the Eucharist, let us remember that we—as Church, in all our homes and all our days—are the fundamental Sacrament, the abiding presence of God in this world. Let us live in that grace, holding up those who are in danger and those who care for them, holding up each other as Paul notes “through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.”

With great and holy affection,

Pastor