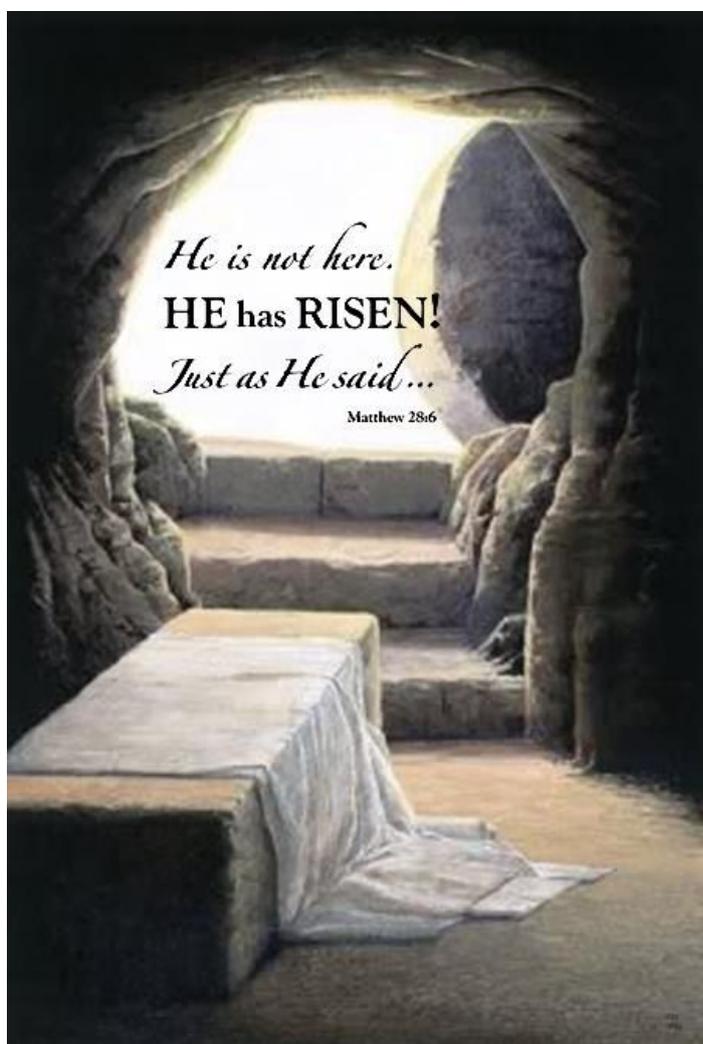


A few words from Fr Joe

Administrator of Mount Merrion, Kilmacud and Clonskeagh parish communities.

We live in strange times, none of us could have anticipated the arrival of a pandemic and all the sadness and suffering it would bring to our country and communities. From the parish perspective, the single greatest change is the church being closed, except for funerals, and Mass being something we access only through the live streaming and without companionship or communion. I can't thank the parishioners enough for the way these changes have been accepted and the participation in the live streaming has been fantastic.



In the Dublin Diocese half of our 400 priests are cocooned and among them Fr Brian, Fr Paddy and Fr Fergus. These men have accepted this with sound common sense and continue to be a supportive presence to the community, saying a daily mass in their homes, and contacting the sick and elderly by phone. The remaining parish staff are either cocooned or working shorter hours and assisting with the provision of Mass and funerals. I am very grateful for their co-operation and support. A small number of volunteers, all under 70 and in good health, are actively assisting with the live streaming, reading, flowers and liturgies and their support has been vital. The Archdiocese has stayed in touch with the parishes

during this time, Archbishop Diarmuid sent a video message of Hope during Holy Week and his staff keep on top of the regulations which govern all gatherings with special attention to funerals.

For myself the greatest challenge has been the increased number of funerals. Not alone have we had many more than normal but the restrictions have made it very hard for families to grieve and celebrate the rites and rituals. The Government considered cancelling all funeral Masses but in the end, choose to allow families to avail of a private funeral Mass, which can be live streamed, but is restricted to 10 mourners in the church. At the beginning this felt hopeless, but as the days have passed we find it more normal to use the web cam and are convinced that those who attend the funeral from afar, are in fact very much participating in the prayers and song and they hear the words spoken about the deceased and can offer their condolences online. I have had very moving feedback from Holland, Italy, Australia and all over Ireland which is a huge affirmation for us all.

Looking to the future we wait in hope and expectation, there will be an end to this pandemic and in the meantime, there will be steps taken to allow normal life to return. I imagine that gatherings in churches are unlikely to be the first thing permitted. Even a return to allowing 100 people to gather with social distancing would be something. It would be very nice to be able to reopen the church and allow parishioners out for a walk to drop in and offer a prayer. I have scattered thoughts now and again about things we might be able to do, like have a Mass in the carpark, with the people staying in their vehicles and an altar at the Millennium Garden.



Signs of Spring in UCD

Another thought was a Light of Hope prayer service, where parishioners could email or write in intentions and we could stream a service while lighting candles for these intentions. Maybe others will share thoughts about things we could do. I noticed that one church in the States had printed out pictures of parishioners and taped them to the seats, but to be honest that's a lot of ink and paper! In the coming week, I will write to parishioners about the financial

realities of managing without collections and suggesting how those who can, might contribute online or by post. I have had a number of donations for the parish and some Easter Dues dropped into No 79 and that has been much appreciated.

For me the most moving and uplifting experience was driving behind the hearse, after a funeral Mass, with just the 10 people from the congregation, in order to pass by the home of the deceased. To turn a corner and see people at every gate, standing in silence, or clapping, offering their support to the bereaved was incredibly emotional. You can't stop compassion, no virus will diminish the love, respect and support that parishioners have for each other.

Thanks to all our over 70's for your resilience and patience and while it's so tough to stay at home, it's the safest place. Thank you to everyone for being exceptional neighbours to each other and for looking out for the elderly and housebound.

Lastly, I think all the time about our children and young people. I can't imagine how hard it is to be mostly restricted to home. Being grounded was one of the worst punishments my parents could impose and only after we had done something wrong. You have done nothing to deserve this and I know you are making huge efforts to keep to a routine, to be kind to everyone else at home and are missing your wider family and friends. You will deserve many treats when this is over and no doubt you are growing closer to those you love by sharing so much time with them. I love your artwork in the windows, rainbows and flags, it really cheers up a walk to see your support for the people on the front line, and for the sick.

Please stay at home, stay safe, wash your hands and say some prayers!

