



An Advent Message from Bishop W. Shawn McKnight

This Advent promises to be like none other. With the pandemic raging, it is important to find ways to nurture our faith as we look forward to the great feast of the Incarnation, the Son of God becoming one of us..

Many of us will miss being with loved ones in person. Many will also miss the beautiful traditions of small faith groups, penance services, and in-person parish retreats held during Advent.

But perhaps God can use the effects of the pandemic, even the isolating effect of social distancing, for good. What if we were able to take advantage of this shuttering of our busy lives to observe Advent as our Church has always encouraged us to do: a time of reflection, a time of quieting, a time of stillness, to make room for Christ in our daily lives?

Many parishes in our diocese have a beautiful tradition of forming small faith groups and parish retreats during Advent. This year, you are encouraged to consider meeting virtually or using your immediate household – what we Catholics call the “domestic church” – as a small faith group.

During Advent many will have their children home – even college students. Take advantage of this closeness to pray together, to celebrate the rich traditions of our Church! Get out that family Advent wreath – light the candles in the evening at dinnertime. Bless your Christmas tree. Spend time as a family together in prayer in front of your Nativity scene.

To support you in this, the Diocese recommends using a spiritual journal, such as the Jesse Tree Advent Journal, published by the Dominican Sisters of Mary. It can be ordered from their [website](#) or [Amazon](#).

All are also invited to join an online Advent retreat, led by Redemptorist Father Michael McAndrew. The Spanish-language retreat will be livestreamed at facebook.com/MinisterioHispanoJC/ at 7 p.m. Monday through Wednesday, Nov. 23-25. The English-language retreat will be livestreamed at facebook.com/diojeffcity/ at 7:30 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, Dec. 7-9.

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops' page for [Advent](#) has more resources, including prayers from the prayer book commissioned by the bishops, [Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers](#).

Furthermore, in recognition of how so many of us must focus on caring for those who are ill, supporting our health care professionals and being particularly supportive of our immediate family, the launch of the diocesan pastoral plan will have to be delayed. A new date for the issuance of the diocesan plan will be provided in early 2021. Be assured your priests, parish leadership and diocesan staff are continuing to work on the various elements of their individual parish plan. However, we believe a formal issuance of a pastoral letter and diocesan plan should be postponed until we can give the proper attention to this important moment in the life of our local Church.

Many parishes have organized volunteers to assist those in need. If you know of someone who could use assistance, please reach out to your local parish.

Let us continue to pray for all affected by the pandemic, especially those who have died, those who are ill and their loved ones, our health care professionals, our school teachers and administrators, and all “essential workers.” Please join Catholics throughout our diocese in praying to the [Immaculate Heart of Mary](#), our patroness, for protection. The prayer is given below.

O Immaculate Heart of Mary, we entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick.

At the foot of the Cross, you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith.

Patroness of the Diocese of Jefferson City, you know what we need.

We are certain of the power of your intercession, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee,

joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us:

He who taught us to “love one another, as I have loved you”

took our sufferings upon Himself and bore our sorrows

to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection.

Bring under your mantle of protection all who provide care for the sick and minister to their needs, as your Son implores us to do for one another.

V. We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God.

R. Do not despise our pleas and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Amen.