

FOR RELEASE ON APRIL 1, 2021 AT 8:30 A.M.

(NOTE: Researched and written for class.)

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ST. THOMAS AQUINAS PREPARES FOR EASTER MASSES

COVID-19 Adjustments and Information Regarding Weekend Masses

AMES, IOWA, April 1 – St. Thomas Aquinas’ parish prepares for another year of Easter Masses amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

St. Thomas Aquinas will offer a variety of options for parishioners and the public to attend Easter Masses. On Thursday, the Mass of the Lord’s Supper will be held at 7 p.m. in the church and will be livestreamed for those unable to attend or those who do not feel safe to attend. On Friday, the Liturgy of the Lord’s Passion will be held at 7 p.m. in the church and will be livestreamed. On Saturday, the Easter Vigil Mass will be held at 8 p.m. in the church and will be livestreamed. On Sunday, Easter Sunday Mass will be held at 8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m. and 7 a.m. in the church. The 10:30 a.m. Sunday Mass will be livestreamed. All live streams can be found on the church website.

Emily Klaus, the director of campus ministry at St. Thomas Aquinas, explained how the church will handle the crowds at the Masses. “We are planning for a lot of people to be there on Easter Sunday at all of our Masses so we are trying to plan ahead on those things,” said Klaus. The church is planning to send overflow, parishioners that will not fit in the worship space, to watch Mass in their lower lounge. In the lower lounge, there will be televisions presenting the livestream. With the COVID-19 pandemic present, the parish staff is hoping to make people feel safe and comfortable while still being able to see and hear Mass.

Klaus explained the efforts that the church staff has made and will make for Easter weekend. “The worship space changes so much within that time. The colors are changing, some of the plants are changing and the environment itself is changing so quickly that we always need a lot of volunteers to help switch those things out within a 24 hour period. Between Thursday, Friday, Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday, there are a lot of hands trying to do those things,” said Klaus.

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FACTS

- St. Thomas Aquinas' parish began around 1942 because Ames needed another Catholic parish to accommodate the growing number of Catholic students at Iowa State University.
- The first pastor at St. Thomas Aquinas was the Rev. James Supple who served from 1947 to 1980.
- When the Rev. James Supple was appointed the first pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas parish in 1947, the parish consisted of 75 families and 1,154 students.
- The church currently has a staff of 16 people.
- There are currently four peer ministers living in apartments in the church.

- The mission statement of St. Thomas Aquinas is, “Gathered. Transformed. Sent.”
- The church typically holds three or four food drives each year to collect food for food banks and other organizations.
- The church serves the community by helping with rent and utility assistance.

STRATEGY STATEMENT

Emily Klaus, director of campus ministry at St. Thomas Aquinas, described the current public relations (PR) strategies of the church by saying, “I think it’s best done by word of mouth by people who have experienced and love St. Thomas and are inviting people to come to an event, Mass or service. I would say the most effective is by word of mouth.” The parish currently focuses their PR efforts on reaching Iowa State University students. The parish attends club fests, welcome fests and is sponsored in various university booklets. Additionally, their Mass times are advertised in newspapers and magazines and weekly email announcements are sent out. Klaus helps with the PR efforts directed at students. She said that she would love to have the aesthetic and look of their emails and advertisements more clean. Klaus mentioned that she looked into buying advertising space on CyRide, the Iowa State University bus system, but it is currently out of the parish’s price range.

After listening to St. Thomas Aquinas’ current PR efforts, I can offer some suggestions to make it better. Personally, the way that I found out about St. Thomas was through word of mouth. I do not frequently see advertisements for St. Thomas Aquinas, so there must not be a very good reach. To begin, I would follow through with Klaus’ desire to make their emails and ads more aesthetically pleasing. In my experience, I find that students are more attracted to and are more impacted by ads that look clean and simplistic. I would also develop a stronger social media presence. Although the church already is established on social media, it is important to continue to grow and adjust to students online. Iowa State University students make up a majority of St. Thomas Aquinas’ parish because of the convenient location and student center. I believe that students are much more likely to be impacted by online advertising than print advertising. Therefore, online advertising will help grow the population of regular student parishioners. The parish has many events throughout the year held for all parishioners. Allowing PR efforts beyond word of mouth advertising and simple advertisements in booklets or magazines will allow students to grow awareness of the parish.