

# St. Anselm ministering to isolated parishioners, offering online prayer requests

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Volunteers at St. Anselm Parish in Ross are making calls from their own homes to longtime parishioners, prioritizing seniors and those living alone, to offer spiritual and material support during the public health emergency.



“We are reaching out to as many parishioners as possible to see if the parish can assist them in any way,” Father Jose Shaji, pastor of the Marin County parish, told Catholic San Francisco in a March 21 email. “Not only spiritual assistance but any kind of assistance.”

“The response has been very positive,” parishioner Pat Langley said. “People really like the idea of their parish reaching out this way.”

Earlier this year a survey of St. Anselm parishioners revealed that a majority feel the parish and the universal church should do a better job of reaching out to all members of the parish community regardless of age, gender, marital status or sexual orientation.

Langley said she is one of about eight people at the parish who have made about 80 calls so far. Young people in the parish have volunteered to fetch groceries and medicine.

“So far we’ve had no takers” for help she said, but the human touch of a call made and a conversation had during an uncertain time in history seems as welcome as an offer for help.

“Another reason we are doing these calls is that people who live alone and may not have contact, are having contact,” said Langley.

People she talks to are concerned but not panicked.

“People are just accepting that this is what they have to do for the better of the community,” she said. “We are only a week into it, though. Who knows what happens if this goes on for months.”



Many on the St. Anselm outreach call team are also members of the Marin Organizing Committee, a network of faith communities, nonprofits, educational, civic and labor groups.

The committee is advocating the county pass a law that would freeze evictions resulting from job loss or illness during the crisis. Gov. Gavin Newsom is allowing counties to pass their own such laws.

Langley said the volunteers are asking the parishioners they call to email the Board of Supervisors with a letter of support for such a measure.

"It's important right now that our parishioners have a sense they can do something to help someone else," she said.

The outreach effort is in addition to online prayer intentions that a group at San Anselm has been receiving since early March.

Parishioner Robert Yee Meave said he had the idea from an article about a convent in New York that has been accepting prayer petitions for over 100 years to include in their nightly prayer -- first by written or oral request, and then later people phoned their requested intentions.

"It made me think that we could start a group and receive requests through a web link, which I then established," he said in an email. "It went live in early March, and requests have been increasing as word gets out and people see the link on the parish website."

Meave sends the group an email with each new request.

"We begin praying for that intention that night," he said. "We also include the pope's monthly intention in our prayers. We are very pleased that requests are coming in, and to have the opportunity to pray for those intentions."

Examples of intentions include: A single parent asks for our prayers that she can find a new job with better pay; a request to pray for a relative in the military stationed overseas; that we pray to alleviate the fear and anxiety related to the COVID-19 virus, and that the Lord may carry us on his shoulders through this time; for good health due to cancer; for a daughter with ALS; for an elderly father who is hospitalized following a fall.

"What I'd like to emphasize is that anyone can use the site -- this is not limited to St. Anselm parishioners," he said. "Also, if other parishes wish to come up with their own group, I'm happy to share the design of the form or help them to establish a link on their own website to our group."

"Other people are very welcome to join our group -- whatever can be done to have more people praying and more people knowing that this resource exists."