

Mike Edwards Interview

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SPEAKERS

Mike Edwards, Christopher Taylor

Christopher Taylor 00:17

So for this oral history, our interest is really just to look at the ways in which COVID has affected different people of faith and a variety of different religions, and see how people have reacted to this thing. And so I suppose my first question then is, how has the spread of COVID-19 impacted the way that you reach out to your parish or talk to people in your religious community?

Mike Edwards 00:47

That's a pretty good question. Within our parish, we have different groups that we have, a men's group and a women's group, and stuff like that, and one way we've reached out is through text messages and emails. But one of the things that I noticed with our parish specifically, is for the parish to do it it's been a lot more difficult because people's phone numbers aren't correct, their emails aren't correct. Every time they've tried to do a Mass live, it hasn't worked out very well, so much so that even this past weekend, our priests had a flyer to update our information, because it's just been really hard. One of the things we're gonna try to do, as we open the church back up because we were closed for a while, was to do it alphabetically, and then he would email or call those families, text them. But the numbers were so wrong, right off the bat they never really got around to it. So right now, they're trying to go through and get everybody's numbers updated and correct so they can make a master list. But interestingly each of the individual groups, and the leaders of those groups have everybody's emails within that group. The only problem with that is you only get the same people that normally go to church or normally participate in all the church activities, are the ones that are still going. And the ones that come occasionally, or only go to church and don't participate in all the other church activities, they're kind of left out. They don't know when mass is, they don't know when things like confession are, and all that sort of stuff, just because they're not going to mass regularly. And they're not getting information. The only downside to that is that every single every day our daily mass is recorded, and streamed live on Facebook, so we can get some information there, and then Sunday Mass is streamed live on Facebook.

Christopher Taylor 02:45

That's awesome. So you've been able to use different social media platforms in order to stream the same kind of services. Is this something that you guys were doing prior to COVID? Or is this something new?

Mike Edwards 03:02

No, when COVID hit, and they started closing down churches, there was a panic, because, you know, I feel bad for any religious leader trying to lead. They're fostering this crazy period, because you would think that as a country like America, we'd have better communication lines set up. I think if you look at it historically speaking, we were probably better at it when we had fallen trees and stuff like that back in the day during the Cold War, you know, and stuff like that. Communication's great but it's also I think created a lot of emptiness and a lot of individuality that breaks up the community a little bit, like the church community itself. So yeah, we've taken advantage of stuff we haven't taken advantage of before, like our email or our website's not that great. It's changed hands and who's been in charge of it. So when certain people become in charge of it, you know, I think it's changed on how they use it and try to narrow that down. One of our deacons is responsible for some of the stuff on there now and helped out a little bit, but it was a drastic change, and it took a huge learning curve.

Christopher Taylor 04:12

For sure. And like with this, now that you've kind of recognized this, do you feel like this is something that within the church leadership that they plan on continuing to use these kinds of platforms or having somebody that's more frequently updating those kinds of contacts?

Mike Edwards 04:29

I hope so, I hope that we do a better job of updating contact and updating those platforms. I do see an increase. So what was interesting is when we started to livestream the Mass, I actually think initially, we had an increase in attendance, because then you could sit at home and go to Mass, and the Bishop has given us dispensation. So dispensation is the right of the ability to stay home and not have to put yourself in danger by going to Mass because in the Catholic faith, the Sabbath is a holy day. And if you don't go to church on the Sabbath, which is Saturday night through Sunday, you know, Jewish history when the Sabbath starts. So if you want to go to Mass on TV, you can do that. And I think originally, numbers were pretty high, you could look at the counter of the people that were actually logged on and watching, and it was higher than I thought it was going to be. But I think as COVID has drawn out, those numbers have dropped off too, which is unfortunate. I mean, there's more people going back to church now, and we have more people attending Mass regularly, but I don't think the numbers would match up to the total number of people who are trying to do it online and now they've just kind of slipped away a little too.

Christopher Taylor 05:45

Yeah it's like maybe initially, there's kind of that novelty, and it seems like a great idea, so you get kind of more buy-in in the beginning, and then as it becomes more of the casual, people are like I can go look at it later. And so I could see that being an issue.

Mike Edwards 05:58

The nice thing about the Catholic faith, though, is that historically speaking, there've been several Catholic news stations, Catholic channels that you could get the apps for stuff like that and watch Mass from your house every Sunday for people that are like invalid and stuff like that, that can't actually get to church. We have several news organizations and church organizations that actually livestream -I've been live streaming that for several years. Big networks, like EWGN and Kappa Channel and Ave Maria Radio and, and a few others are really big. And they reach a lot of people globally. So we had

access to some technology and access to things like Sunday Masses only. So we're doing daily Masses that you can log into, but parish, on the parish side of it, it was very difficult.

Christopher Taylor 06:53

So on the larger scale, there's always been some -or not always- but there has been a longer history of, you know, at least being able to tune into Mass, but as far as the local parish and doing local community activities, that's where it's been tough, and this has been a new experience.

Mike Edwards 07:07

Yeah, a huge hurdle to try to climb.

Christopher Taylor 07:09

Do you feel like when you look at the types of people that are coming or not, do you feel like there's any particular group that you've noticed that you've been shocked that they're not coming, like if it's youth or the elderly or anything like that?

Mike Edwards 07:25

That's interesting. We have four church services. We have one on Saturday evening, and then Sunday, 8am, Sunday at 10am, and then Spanish Mass Sunday at noon. I typically go to the Saturday evening Mass, and I participate quite a bit in it. I'm a lecturer, I help out, I've ushered when people are not there, I do a lot. But right now, in the last maybe month or so, regular attendance on Saturdays has been pretty stable at about 70ish, which is close, for the size of our church, with keeping distancing six feet and stuff like that, has been pretty close to as far as we can get. And it's the same people that went there, who were coming to Mass before the pandemic. And for the most part, there's a few people that aren't coming because of risk health and stuff like that. And other than that, though, I don't know, now I've been told that like the 8am Mass on Sunday morning is very poorly attended. All the talk about the other day is that the Deacon says it isn't too bad. I mean, I don't get up on Sundays anyway. So it'd be hard for me to go.

Christopher Taylor 08:53

Do you feel like many of these new kinds of social media outlets are gonna become a staple of the church moving forward then?

Mike Edwards 08:59

I really hope not because our sacraments are very very important to us, and receiving Holy Communion, receiving absolution of penance for going to Confession, those have to be done in person. You can't do confessionals over the phone, you can't do confessionals over Zoom, because of possible people tapping into it and stuff like that. And then you can't receive the sacrament of the Eucharist, you have to be in person for that. And that's a big part of our faith. And to stay online would, I think, do damage to our faith greatly.

Christopher Taylor 09:33

I think that's really interesting that you bring that up. I think when most people think of religion, they think of it as just like learning stuff, you know, learning the doctrine, and yet, like you say, you know,

there's a lot more to it. And I would say particularly in the Catholic faith, the emphasis of the sacraments and these kind of, you know, ordinances or rituals that are performed that really can't be substituted with just some kind of service like this.

Mike Edwards 09:57

It's hard to do a baptism over the internet. You throw water at your TV screen? Yeah, there's definitely that. You know I teach the confirmation class which is also another sacrament, and that's actually a two year requirement of learning to be confirmed. You know, and we've had to make the adjustments for that too. We went all the way down to just twelve students per class and we have six feet between each student in the class, and it's been kind of difficult.

Christopher Taylor 10:30

Are there some of those kinds of rituals that have had to stop entirely as a result of it or been put off until they could find a solution for it?

Mike Edwards 10:38

There has. So when they first shut down, obviously Communion was done, and even Confessions were done, because everything was shut down completely. And then we've moved into a phase where some people are able to go back to church, Confessional was done sometimes -it depends on the state- and what the local laws are in the states, a lot of stuff like that, and the rules that the mayors and governors are placing out there. Luckily, the Supreme Court made a nice ruling yesterday for religious faith, especially in New York City. But we actually had where you could do a drive by Confessions in person, but they wanted to keep the distance between the person going to Confession and the priest, so the priests would sit outside the parking lot, and pull the car up next to them, and they would roll the window down and do just Confession in the parking lot. Which -crazy- but I mean, because those sacraments mean so much to us, people are willing to do that. I think there's a lot of frustration out there, there's a lot of people that would like to go to church, they would like to have a more normal life. They would like to see the sacraments. But they're also a lot of people that are scared because of COVID, and the possible, spreading from like that. One of the things that we've done specifically in our diocese, (so the diocese is the whole state of Utah) we're required to receive Communion in the hand, historically speaking, received either on the tongue or in the hand. Some people think that in the hand isn't as reverent as on the tongue, because you could drop it. But all the way back as far as the second century, there's been guidelines for that, to receive it in the hand, by some of the early church fathers, from the third century. And there's been a lot of conservation over people wanting to receive it in the mouth, and actually, what's really weird is you have some people in some places that will refuse to go to church if the hand receives the offering. Which I mean, for me, I think I don't know if I'd call it petty, but I think it's the lack of understanding of how to do it reverently in the hand, as opposed to on the tongue. Does that make sense? There's a way to do it reverently and I think you should be able to swallow your pride a little bit and if you want to really receive the sacrament, you receive the sacrament, you know?

Christopher Taylor 13:14

Is that something where -because I wouldn't even have thought of that- but yeah, there's probably some people that would see it as the compromise being made in an effort to to perform these. They don't think that it's good enough or acceptable...

Mike Edwards 13:31

Yeah and that's a poor understanding of the faith. I think in recent years, catechesis has been poor, I know that my catechesis was poor. Now that I teach it, I wish I would have learned the stuff when I was a kid that I'm teaching now. Because I don't think either I'm ignorant and I forgot that I learned it or it was never taught to me to begin with. I'm kind of a smart guy, I think I'd remember some of the stuff. So it's interesting, they say ignorance is bliss, but I don't know if ignorance is gonna get you to heaven.

Christopher Taylor 14:14

Do you think that recognizing this maybe from a church leadership standpoint, have they maybe rethought, that maybe there are some of these things that we need to go back through and evaluate how we've taught?

Mike Edwards 14:24

Yeah, I think even a little bit before COVID, but definitely because of COVID I think church leadership is starting to understand that a lot of people don't really understand, you know, how to do the sacraments correctly or what the church moral standards on certain issues are or you know, what the catechesis is, you know. We've got the Catechism of the Catholic Church which was propagated by Vatican two back in the 1960s. We had a catechism before that called the Baltimore Catechism but the Catechism of the Catholic Church is a pretty thick book, but it's got all the rules of the Church in it and now they're saying, the vast majority of Catholics have never opened one.

Christopher Taylor 15:07

Yeah. I guarantee that that's not just a Catholic issue. That's a general problem.

Mike Edwards 15:14

Absolutely. And so that responsibility kind of falls on us, the laity, and we're not doing a good job of that either. Obviously, I think, if more people were true to their faith, we'd have a lot less problems as we're having in society today. You know, the two greatest commandments that Jesus gave when the Sadducees and the Pharisees tried to corner more, number one, love God, above all else, and number two, love your neighbor as you love yourself. If you love your neighbors and you love yourself, we're not gonna have rioting, we're gonna have protests, we're not gonna have racism, we're not gonna have all that other stuff, right?

Christopher Taylor 15:48

Yeah. That's really interesting. So you do a teaching class, right? For youth? Have you mentioned any of that with them? Or have you gotten a feel for what they feel like?

Mike Edwards 16:03

Oh absolutely. You know, the youth have a hard time. It's probably not just in the Catholic Church, but they think church is boring. "Why don't have to get up on Sundays?", stuff like that. So, you know, you

got to kind of try to sell it, as a catechesis teacher, why it's important, stuff like that. And that was actually one of my lessons I did this last Monday was loving your neighbor as you love yourself. You know, and, and part of the thing I talked about is, you know, you would have to understand what loving yourself means also, you know. It means treating your body with respect, it means doing what's morally right. You know, how can you treat somebody else that way, if you don't even treat yourself that way. I think that has been a new direction that some of the stuff the church is doing, at least I'm hoping so.

Christopher Taylor 17:02

As far as COVID is concerned with either youth or elderly or just kind of the people that you know, what kind of impact do you think COVID has had on people's faith? Do you think that with kind of these events like catastrophe that people are drawing away? Or maybe in what way? I'm sure it's kind of a combination, but maybe in what ways have they drawn closer to the faith? And maybe moved away?

Mike Edwards 17:22

it's interesting, I think, I think it kind of ebbs and flows. I think, when you have a, we have a pattern like this, I think a lot of people turn to faith quickly. The problem was that as this happened, turning to faith is a hard thing to do, because churches were closed down. You know what I mean? I think it butted heads there, I think in a regular situation, you know, take a typical war, you know, what was church attendance during the World War, did it increase or decrease? I'm assuming that it increased, right? But during a pandemic, I would assume the church attendance would increase except for the churches were closed. So I think you get a lot of pushback because of that. And a lot of distrust in the government. And, I don't know. I know that in the past few years, laities, for Catholics, I mean, every church has problems with, with membership leaving in the pandemic, sometimes, but not all. But what I have seen is that those that still try to go to church and those that remain faithful, their faith has been deepened. If that makes sense.

Christopher Taylor 18:32

Yeah.

Mike Edwards 18:33

They're stronger in their faith, if they've stayed positive, and stayed going to church if they could, or watching it on tv, and they're taking time to read and listen to Catholic radio and stuff like that.

Christopher Taylor 18:49

That's interesting, because I agree. I think like you said, you know, when you have a catastrophe, there's a lot of people I think would naturally turn to religion. But it complicates it when they can't turn to religion, at least not in the way that you want to because of the pandemic. And that would probably lead to like you mentioned, the frustration.

Mike Edwards 19:05

I think that's what you're seeing nationwide, so many churches, speaking out against the government as restrictions are handed down, you know, it's like Governor Cuomo doesn't allow churches to meet but he allows supermarkets to be open. And, you know, he lost in that Supreme Court case, so the churches can remain open. You know, what I mean? It's interesting, I think some governors, I think,

some government officials have figured out, the mayor of LA just last week, closed everything down, except for two things, protests and churches. Both of them are rights. And I think a lot of Americans feel cheated and that they are not able to experience personal rights where other businesses are being able to be left open. So I think you see a little bit of a ground swelling of faithful -in general- pushing back against the government in some of these regulations that are being pushed on, not just in the Catholic faith, but I think the other faiths too. People want to go to church and the government's not letting us do it, so it becomes okay, where are we at as a society?

Christopher Taylor 20:07

Yeah, and that's interesting, you know, as far as the political nature, it's like people don't want to politicize it. But when, you know, a shutdown does close down your church, you I think in a way, you have to kind of politicize it. Do you feel like that's created any division within the parish or like some people are more willing to go along with it and other people are not?

Mike Edwards 20:26

Yeah I think it's interesting, that there are some people that are divided by some of the people in the parish. I have a really good friend that believes that everything about COVID is a government hoax, and it's a farce and it's not as bad as it seems, and that we're bowing down to the man. And I understand that point of view. If you looked at the total statistics, and the total numbers of people that are dying, and the total of people that are getting sick, and I'm not saying that's a good thing, it's bad when anybody gets sick and when anybody dies, but if you compare it to things like the Spanish flu, or even the normal flu, the numbers aren't that dramatically greater, or in some cases they're smaller. So, the politicizing of the pandemic has, I think, divided people in the parish, for that reason. You know, whether to wear a mask or not, for people that don't like wearing a mask, they don't think they should have to wear masks in church, and there's been a lot of pushback in that. We offer free masks as you come in, if you didn't bring one or you forgot one, and some people have turned around and walked out, and they wouldn't come into church cause they don't want to have to wear a mask, you know. But one part about that is if you're truly Christian, and you're wearing a mask, that's charity. It's not for your protection it's for the protection of everybody around you. And I think we forget that, you know, I think pride, one of the seven deadly sins, definitely plays a huge factor into that, and it's unfortunate.

Christopher Taylor 21:55

In your particular Parish, like if someone were to walk in and decide not to wear a mask, would they have to leave, or have you been given much guidance about that?

Mike Edwards 22:03

Yeah, they would be escorted out because that's what the bishop has said, that the rule is created. And he is our shepherd. And, you know, you can politically not like it, but are you gonna follow the rule of the Catholic Church and the rule that your shepherd has set down or are you gonna be hard-headed and stubborn and not wear it? Most people, even my friend that thinks the pandemic is fake, he will wear his mask to church. He doesn't like it -he hates it- but he does.

Christopher Taylor 22:39

Yeah, and I like how you mentioned, I'm sure you talk about this in your church, but like you said, it's an act of compassion, you know, maybe you don't think it's necessary, but there are going to be people that are here. So for their sensitivity to, to demonstrate that brotherly love to them, you're going to wear it to, to try to demonstrate that we're gonna all be in this together kind of an attitude.

Mike Edwards 22:58

Yeah. But how hard is it? It's not like "okay, I don't like it, yay". You know for Catholics church is an hour. It's not that hard.

Christopher Taylor 23:09

Have there been other -aside from wearing a mask- are there any other restrictions that have been placed on the church?

Mike Edwards 23:33

So we also have spray bottles in front of the church you're required to spray your hands with, whatever it is, the gel they use to kill the germs, and then, before we go up to Communion we're required to wear our face masks as we're walking through the church while going up to Communion. And then the Communion servers, including the priest and the deacons, usually, in the Catholic faith, the priest and the deacon give out Communion, but we have what's called extraordinary ministers that also give out Communion just to help out a little bit. They'll go up and receive their communion and they've got to spray their hands in between each Communion, before they put their hand out for anybody else. So, one of the things they put in, like I said, the other restrictions are 6 feet between people, between each family, the reduction in the size of the classes, um you know, things like that.

Christopher Taylor 24:31

Do you feel like they're...

Mike Edwards 24:32

It's harder too because you have to open up more classes for catechism to get all the students educated. We've had to do online for almost -or take home stuff- for almost all the other sacramental classes. First communion and confirmation are the only catechism classes meeting right now. You know, that's third grade, fourth grade, and seventh and eighth grade. All the other classes aren't meeting right now, and those teachers are doing assignments they get to take home and read that, so we've had to change a lot of stuff that way too.

Christopher Taylor 25:05

Yeah. Have you had many people that you feel like you've expressed gratitude for the willingness for the church to comply and to, you know, to at least get something on the field to do as much as you can?

Mike Edwards 25:17

Oh yeah, there's a lot of people that are super happy that the church is open. And it's a very warm feeling, we have a pretty tight community especially. I mean, it's probably like a lot of other churches, there's groups of people that hang out together within the church and you know, when you've been

quarantined it's nice to see each other. But another thing that happened is that we can't meet in the foyer, we can't stop and greet each other on the way in or the way out, and we can meet outside but as winter comes up, it's gonna be much harder. Yeah, there's a lot of gravity. And there's a lot of people that wish they could go that just won't go because they're afraid of COVID, you know. If you look at the demographics of the Catholic Church here in Utah, it's a lot of older people, a lot of post-forty-year-old people and a lot of much older people too that are Catholic. So they're afraid because they're afraid of getting the virus, and that's understandable.

Christopher Taylor 26:15

Yeah. Has the church tried to -and I know, we talked about this a little bit in the beginning- but has there been any way especially for, like you said, that older generation that may be a little bit more concerned coming in, to try to facilitate that kind of camaraderie or other kind of, you know, instead of hanging out in the foyer, or doing that kind of social gathering something else for them to do to replace that?

Mike Edwards 26:35

Unfortunately, like, it takes me 15 minutes to get to my parish. So organizing events, it's not like it's a community of men that you can meet down with, you know, at the park on the corner and do something for Catholics in Utah. It takes a lot of planning and a lot of orientation and a lot of stuff to make something like that happen. I'm not saying that we can't. And maybe we should, but I think just with, with what COVID has been, and how its treated people, and how people are tired and worn out and they don't want to you know, I think it would be very hard to do. And I think even with that, the people that are afraid to come to church would also be afraid to meet like that. The other thing, that's important too, though, you know, one of our sacraments is the sacrament of healing, (it used to be called last rites) but if you are sick, you can call our priests and they'll show up and give you communion and show you compassion and do your last rites, and he'll pray for you for healing. And he'll do that at the drop of a hat, him and the deacon. They have ran into problems with people that are sick from the hospital, whether they can come in or not, because they only allow families, and stuff like that. Interestingly too, at what point do you restrict clergy from being in the hospital to give people last rites, you know? Not every church does that. But the Catholic church is willing and it's a responsibility that's hard. You know, not being able to do that, and have the government say no, it's frustrating for them. But it also puts them at risk too. I mean, our preist is 54m, our main deacon -who has taken on a lot of responsibility- is 72 or 73. And our newest deacon is 60. So you know, they're old, they're in the high risk areas, but they are willing to go and they know that help is sacred. One thing I've been trying to really push lately in the classes I teach, and I think a lot of other Catholic students too, is that we're only here on Earth for a brief moment, and we're in eternity forever. So is it more important to focus on what's next -forever? Or is it more important to focus on your time here on the planet. So, you know, I think that's been a little bit of the change in the focus of a lot of the teachers that are teaching and stuff like that. And our priests and our deacons really understand that and the reality people face with dying or the possibility of dying.

Christopher Taylor 26:59

Do you feel like there's been an uptick in the number of people asking/reaching out to the priest or the deacon to come?

Mike Edwards 29:57

They're always just busy. So I don't know if it's been more or less busy than usual. The only downside of that is when they've been exposed to somebody for 15 minutes, now they've got to quarantine, and in the state of Utah, we have a limited number of priests and deacons, right? So if, if our priests get quarantined now, you know, what do we do as a congregation? You know, we can have communion services with hosts that have already been consecrated, but it's not a regular full mass, and a deacon can do that but it's not a regular full mass. There's only so many substitute priests in the state of Utah that can fill in for the priest in your area.

Christopher Taylor 30:34

Yeah. Do you think that creates any hesitancy at all among people to call on the bishop knowing that? Or the priest or any of them?

Mike Edwards 30:47

I don't know. I don't think it's caused any hesitancy for the priest to do, you know, what they've been ordained to do. I think they're glad to do it. I think they're cautious and they're wary of the possibilities. But I think our bishop has done a very good job of trying to maintain continuity throughout the state.

Christopher Taylor 31:16

Okay. For COVID, I think that religion plays such an important role in you know, you hear a lot about a lot of people that are struggling with depression, with rise of things like suicide, and, you know, especially with the isolation that a lot of people experience. And even for people that don't have a chance to go to work, because maybe they've been laid off, or they've been furloughed, you know, sometimes work becomes that, that outlet that they need. So what kind of value, or why do you think religion might become so important in stepping in or continuing that role of helping these kind of people out?

Mike Edwards 31:54

I think faith gives us comfort, I think it gives us more comfort than anything else. Going to work is nice and being there for your friends is good, but being able to rely on faith, the benefits of faith I think are really important. I've seen, I've heard studies where you literally are depressed, or having anxiety, if they take medication for it, it can be good. If they take medication, and increase their faithful life, it's even better. But ironically, if they just increase their faithful life, it actually does better than the medication and the faith, if they just decided to deepen their faith. So I think, I think faith is super important.

Christopher Taylor 32:56

Do you feel like within, specifically in Catholicism, are there any particular stories that you feel like are especially important in a time like this that gives comfort?

Mike Edwards 33:09

I think, you know, a lot of those stories would be pretty similar across the Christian faith, and whether it's the New Testament or the Old Testament, you know, for those that endure the hard times, you know, there'll be greatness on the other end, the meek shall inherit the earth. If you look at the Israelites as they came out of Egypt, you know, and the 10 plagues that Moses brought upon Pharaoh, and, you

know, they were able to get out of there. I think that most Christian faiths are going to have those same stories or same typical events that really gave comfort to those that were away, you know, when you see a man in the desert, and God provides for you. I think those are all things that we can rely on. As we look at New Testament verses, and even Old Testament verses.

Christopher Taylor 34:04

That's awesome. Let me just double check. How do you feel that the pandemic has impacted the way that you view religion today? Now that having experienced kind of what you see within your own congregation, and even just within your own family, has that attitude changed or any of that?

Mike Edwards 34:25

I think I'm more frustrated with the way the government has handled it with restrictions and stuff like that. I think there's been a huge shift in our society lately anyway, towards a more socialistic ideal, and one of the basics of socialism is structurally the nuclear family, you know, if you go to some of the basic socialist theories. I think the only way to combat that is to say, I think faith's gonna be the thing that's going to be able to combat the socialist movement within the United States. It's ironic though, we use faith until we don't need it anymore, we don't think we need it anymore. We can rely on it and we can preach it and we can believe in it, and then once everything seems to be better, we seem to lose our faith a little bit. So. I don't know, I hope as the pandemic does bring people back closer to the faith, I hope that they realize that, you know, the material things of the world that we have, they seem to go away with the pandemic with jobs or the amount of money we have in our savings, or whatever, that all that's fleeting, and that faith -the eternal reward is much more important than what we have here on earth.

Christopher Taylor 35:50

Do you think that because of the pandemic, has it been with like your own Parish, any kind of, you know, community efforts with an interfaith joining with other religious denominations to try to express that same kind of an attitude like the importance of faith, regardless of what denomination we're a part of?

Mike Edwards 36:09

I know that in recent years, regardless of the pandemic or not, I know that our Bishop has reached out to other faith communities within the state of Utah to create some ecumenical learning, ecumenical-based ideas across the board. So I think that's a very positive thing. But parish wise, like I said, our parishioners are so few and far between, and then if you look at the other states, I think, Utah is what 5% of Utah's Catholic and then so who else with a Christian faith are we gonna reach out to? We've done some stuff with the LDS Church -it's right across the street from ours. They were really helpful when we were building the church and our new parish and everything like that. But there's even fewer Episcopalians, even fewer, you know, Lutherans, there's even fewer Baptists. So they're even spread out even more, so it'd be interesting. I think they've needed joining with other faiths, but not on a parish level just because they're so spread out.

Christopher Taylor 37:09

That's probably true, probably more of a, from the top position kind of working together. Do you feel like a joint effort like that, or even do you know, if there has been any kind of movement for them to contact, you know, local political leaders or state political leaders? Just to kind of get that voice out, to let them know, because I think, I wonder if some of them think, you know, it is just about, you know, you can listen to a lesson online, but I think they don't realize kind of the necessity of being in person and that kind of an impact...

Mike Edwards 37:42

You know, I don't, I don't know, my assumption in the state of Utah would be that with the government of the state of Utah as being so LDS-centered, and the governor being LDS, I think they probably have a closer connection with that, and will have an easier time of pushing those ideas. And I think that's maybe why the restrictions in Utah aren't as bad as some of the other places. I think the LDS Church is taking a lead in that, and thankfully so. I know that the LDS Church has had their own restrictions they've had to deal with and rotate the times for them to go to church and all that stuff, also. But I think we're lucky to be in a state like this where faith is important, and the government knows that faith's important to us. But I know that, I'm pretty sure that our Bishop meets with the governor. I know that representatives will go to the State Congress and talk about stuff, so I know that it does happen.

Christopher Taylor 38:49

That's awesome that they do have that contact and that hopefully, there's kind of those good feelings and willingness to kind of work together to try to help, you know to make sure that it's not just an LDS thing here in Utah but that all people feel heard.

Mike Edwards 39:01

One of the things I thought was interesting was on charity, and how we responded with families that are needy and stuff like that. The response for -historically for Catholics- has always been very good. You know, if you look at the stats, historically, the cabinet's give more to charity than any other religious faith, you know, in the history of the world. And we still do a lot of that right now. We had a drive for families for Thanksgiving. And we fed families that way. We'll do the same thing for Christmas and the few people that do show up for that give way more than you would expect. The families that went home with turkeys and everything from Thanksgiving drive was, they got enough food for months, for whole families. And then they have things like Catholic community services that people donate money to all the time and they're out in the communities, helping out. And you've got The Lenderton House, which I think, we give money to and donations to, and you've got the soup kitchen down in Salt Lake that feeds homeless people three times a day, every day of the week. And, you know, a lot of stuff is financed through our regular donations to the church on a weekly basis and a yearly basis, also.

Christopher Taylor 40:24

That's good to know, because even though in a time where a lot of people are hurting financially, it's nice to know that those donations haven't, you know, completely dropped off. And it sounds like from what you're saying that it's actually increased, a lot of people are being more generous.

Mike Edwards 40:38

Yeah, I think people realize that other people are struggling, and those that have are giving more than they have in the past -it just feels like it a little bit. Like I said, the amount of food that we had has dramatically increased. The weird part was that we didn't have as many families that requested food. So the ones that got the food got extra because we didn't feed as many as we thought we would, which is a whole other issue.

Christopher Taylor 41:03

Yeah. Do you have within your local area, like you said, you know, leaders checking in on those that they know would probably be hurting more like when you hear about a family that's, you know, maybe somebody's lost a job or been laid off for a little while?

Mike Edwards 41:19

I think our parish does a pretty good job of knowing the families within the parish. And if there are problems, I think there's enough general concern for one another within the parish that we check up on each other regularly. Because by seven degrees of separation, right, everybody knows Kevin Bacon. Within so many steps, so I think word of mouth travels pretty quickly for people in need and stuff like that. You know, we still do funeral services and stuff like that, and they can call the parish at any time and ask for help, and what help we can give.

Christopher Taylor 41:58

That sounds great, sounds like you've got a really well-connected, you know, kind of family unit in your parish.

Mike Edwards 42:03

Yeah, we try, we try. We wish more people would attend, we have a lot of families that are registered to our parish, but church attendance is low. It was low before the pandemic, you know, but the pandemic definitely I don't think has helped out. Like it's really, I think, those that are faithful it's deepened their faith, it just hasn't spread a lot.

Christopher Taylor 42:24

Yeah, I wonder if when this is all over, whenever there is a sense of normal, you know, how many, maybe people that are not currently coming for a variety of different reasons, if you'll see any kind of spike. Or if you feel like it'll be just kind of the same, you know, the same that are probably attending now will be the same that keep coming.

Mike Edwards 42:46

I think we'll have an increase in church attendance cause I know we have parishioners right now that are aching to come but because of fear, because their immune-compromised, and stuff like that, they just don't dare come to church right now. But I think we'll have an increase in church attendance, at least for a while.

Christopher Taylor 43:01

And I wonder even if it's just those that are, like you said, you know, on the lists, but are for whatever reason maybe have been less active for a long period of time, if maybe once normal comes back and you know, if there's this appreciation for it, like, "oh, maybe I appreciate that...I want to go back".

Mike Edwards 43:16

Yeah, I hope that the Holy Spirit does reach out and touch those people and touches their hearts and realizes that, you know, they made it through the pandemic because of the grace of God and that they'll be appreciative and come to church and be grateful and thankful and increase membership and attendance and stuff.

Christopher Taylor 43:33

Okay. Well I really appreciate all your support, maybe just as a final question, is there any other kind of final thoughts you had on the pandemic or on, you know, how it's affected faith that you'd like to kind of leave us off with?

Mike Edwards 43:47

No, I just think it's, I think it's unfortunate, I think my biggest gripe is the strife between local governments and the ability to attend church. My biggest area of concern is you can have tattoo shops open and bars open and grocery stores open, but you can't have church open. That frustrates me, I think it's a violation of our First Amendment rights. I think it's a violation of people's faith rights in general. I think it's a violation of what America was based on. When things like the Supreme Court rules against New York City in their faith requirements, it makes me happy.

Christopher Taylor 44:32

Well, I really appreciate everything you've done for us and I'll talk to you later, man.

Mike Edwards 44:37

Yep! Thanks for the interview!