

July 13, 2020

Dear Friends of St. John the Baptist:

Our Croatian Festival is a century of memories. This traditional “ice cream social” evokes sweet images, for some going back to childhood.

Remember the sound of coins plinking as the raffle wheel begins to spin and the anxious wait to see if your number wins a prize. How about the feeling of meeting with friends over a sarma dinner or talking with old classmates on the grounds? And there is a delicious tickle of a cold beer on a sticky summer night listening to polka music.

It is with a heavy heart that we announce the cancellation of the traditional 2020 Croatian Festival. We have a moral responsibility to health and safety related to COVID-19.

This is not the first time St. John the Baptist parishioners have weathered storms and not the first time summer passed without a festival. Croatians were flooded from their homes in the Bottoms twice - in 1903 and 1951. Many lost sons and brothers to fighting in World War I and World War II. The unrest in Europe during those times caused immense turmoil among parish members for the loved ones left in the “Old Country.”

We all know a bit about the former history of the Strawberry Hill Museum as a shelter for orphaned children. Its beginning was the result of the 1918 influenza epidemic that raged worldwide and took the lives of 124 parishioners. Until the late 1950s, polio made an ugly appearance each summer, crippling the health of our children.

During each of these adversities, our Catholic Croatian families rallied to help one another and continue the heritage they brought across the Atlantic Ocean. It was important to maintain the close-knit community that revolved around St. John the Baptist Church.

Today, St. John’s remains our touchstone. Our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents walked the same grounds, sat in the same pews and looked up at the same stained glass windows. It is our history and our heritage.

Even without the 2020 festival, we still need your support. Last year, our festival raised more than \$60,000. These funds help us continue the legacy of those who came before us.

Each year, you contribute prizes or soda pop, buy sarma dinners or hamburgers, buy a T-shirt and play quarters at the raffle booths. We ask you to consider contributing that money to our church even though this gesture comes without the fun, fellowship, food and drink, and prizes.

Enclosed you will find tickets for our traditional money raffle, the 50/50 Raffle and a donation form, Support St. John's.

Like our ancestors, we will support one another and our church to overcome this unprecedented time. When the threat of the virus has passed, we will gather again to celebrate the Croatian way. Your continued prayers and support are greatly appreciated.

May God bless you,

Chris Schneider
Chairman, Festival Committee