

Pastoral Ministry During the Pandemic

I heard about this website at the AAHM conference. I am a Catholic Priest and I teach History at Villanova University outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In addition to my teaching and research duties, I celebrate mass and hear the confessions of students, and I help out in a Catholic parish church in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania on weekends. Villanova University went online in the Spring of 2020, but we were open for in-person classes in the Fall of 2020 and the Spring of 2021. I taught in person in the Fall of 2020 and the Spring of 2021. A lot of my colleagues elected to teach online. I felt that it was my duty as a priest to be available to the public during the pandemic, so I ministered in person on campus and the parish during the past year. You can't abandon the sheep. I took a measure of risk in doing this. I am 63 years old and had pre-existing health conditions. I also live in a monastery with forty-two other priests. I belong to the Order of St. Augustine. We lost three priests in the house from COVID in the course of the past year. The funerals were small and grim. We lost two-other men outside the community. In the Spring and Fall of 2020, I was unvaccinated. However, I was vaccinated with the Pfizer vaccine on January 21, 2021, so I felt safer in the Spring semester. The parish church I help out at was closed for two months in 2020, we opened back up in April of 2020. We wore masks and social distanced. As far as I know, nobody died of COVID in the parish. I think that the height of 2020 for me was giving first communion to children in June of 2020. I did so for a group of children again three weeks ago. It was great to be able to celebrate something in the time of pandemic. I gave in person final exams just a week ago. The students were very effected by this. I celebrate weekday masses on campus and they were packed. Some students came just for a blessing. I think that being at mass comforted them. I also heard a lot of confessions. The students were really scared. We had a significant number of COVID cases on campus, but thankfully, no deaths. I am grateful that I had the good fortune to be able to minister in person during the pandemic. I'm also grateful that I did not get COVID doing it. I'm hopeful for the end of the pandemic, and I am looking forward to my summer break.