

Saint Mary of Sorrows Parish 2026 Labor Day Picnic Frequently Asked Questions

1. History: How long has the parish been conducting family picnics?

Answer: This will be the 142nd annual Saint Mary of Sorrows parish family picnic. The parish held its initial family picnic on the grounds of what is now called the Historic Church in Fairfax Station on the 4th of July, 1884, to celebrate God's many blessings to our Catholic community. Years later, as 4th of July celebrations became increasingly more wide-spread locally and in the Nation's Capital, the parish moved the timing of its picnics to the fall season. In 1919, the church picnic was held on Labor Day weekend for the very first time. All subsequent parish family picnics have been on Labor Day. Following consecration of the new church, the location for the parish family picnics shifted from the Historic Church to the grounds of the parish center in 2022.

2. Schedule: What will be the overall picnic schedule of events?

Answer: Guests will be provided a brochure at the Information Desk containing the detailed schedule of events, games, and activities. In general:

- *10:00 am: Mass celebrated at the Church, followed by a pastoral blessing*
- *11:00 am: Free picnic games, contests, and activities commence*
- *11:00 am: Prepared foods, treats, country store items, houseplants, garden veggies, White Elephant items, and baked goods available for purchase*
- *11:30: Family bingo games in Saint Joseph's Hall*
- *2:00 pm: Picnic ends*

3. Site Map: Where may picnic goers obtain up a printed site map?

Answer: At the Information desk co-located with the Picnic Headquarters location, between the church grounds and the parish center grounds.

4. Old and New: Which events will be carried over from last year and what features will be new this year?

Answer:

Carried over: A variety of free games, activities, and contests for attendees of all ages; sales of hot dogs and hamburgers; sales of BBQ chicken dinners; sales of pizza by the slice; ice cream bars, and Sno-cones; baked goods sales; houseplant and garden veggie sales; White Elephant sales; Family Bingo games; pie eating contests; tours of the church; and ministry tables.

We will again conduct a Raffle with a single prize consisting of 20 assorted Virginia Lottery Scratch-off game cards. We will again consolidate the sales location for hotdogs & hamburgers, pizza-by-the-slice, sno-cones, ice cream treats, and BBQ chicken dinners into a “food court” type arrangement in the parish center parking lot proximate to the rear of Farrell Hall.

New in 2026:

- Having a mobile sound stage/performance center to showcase musical talent and entertainment
- Allocating space in the parking lot for static display for classic/vintage cars
- Implementing a ticket sales mechanism for selected food items
- Providing a moon bounce event and a mulch pit dig
- Cooking funnel cakes (run by the Knights)
- Spotting of a fire truck manned by local County fire departments.
- Having a 50/50 drawing with benefits going to the parish.
- Offering space in the parking lot for vendors to display and sell merchandise
- Seeking sponsors to offset costs via donations
- Having a vendor grill and sell hot dogs and hamburgers
- Providing opportunities for parishioners to display classic/antique cars
- Providing space for vendors to display and sell merchandise

5. Cost: What does the picnic cost?

Answer: All games, contests, and activities are free, as are parking and bingo games.

6. Food: What types of food and treats will be available?

Answer: Picnic goers may purchase a variety of delicious cooked and other items, including:

- *Hot dogs, hamburgers, and sodas*
- *BBQ chicken dinners*
- *Pizza by the slice*
- *Ice cream bars*

- *Sno-cones*
- *Brownies, cookies, pies, cakes, jams and jellies, and garden veggies will be available for purchase as part of the Country Store.*

7. Non-food Purchases: What other items will be available for purchase?

Answer: Picnic goers may purchase a variety of houseplants and White Elephant items, the other two elements of the Country Store.

8. Parking: Where will attendees park?

Answer: We are implementing strict control to improve vehicular access to the picnic and add a level of safety for all picnic attendees.

- *Church driveway off of Zion Road.* *Most drivers attending the 10 am Mass enter the church grounds off of Zion Road and park in multiple rows of parking up from and directly across from the church. The spaces for handicap parking in front of the church usually fill up quickly. Other drivers access the church parking lot via an entrance off of Sideburn Road and turn left, climbing the rise into the parking lots facing the church. When the Mass ends, many people choose to leave their cars in those upper parking lots and walk on the sidewalk extending from the church to the picnic grounds. The only option for any Mass-going drivers who do not plan to attend the picnic will be to exit the church grounds via the entrance on Zion Road. That roadway in front of the church will remain open for two-way vehicular traffic coming to and departing from the picnic all day.*
- *Sideburn Road parish center driveway closest to the church:* *Fifteen minutes after the Mass commences, we will place traffic cones and swimming-pool type red banners at two locations closing vehicular traffic entirely on that roadway. One location will be at the top of the driveway entrance on Sideburn Road. The other location will be on the lower end of that driveway (where it essentially flattens out into parking lots) near the bagged ice storage point on the grassy area in the church parking lot. This design will prevent any vehicular traffic coming from either the church roadway or from that access point off of Sideburn Road into the parish center/picnic grounds.*
- *Sideburn Road parish center driveway closest to Commonwealth Boulevard.* *This driveway will be open for two-way vehicular traffic during the picnic. Some areas in the parking lot will be blocked off from parking for picnic activities/*

events. The circular driveway in front of the parish center will remain open. The Traffic Management Team will mark off additional parking spaces in the parish center parking lot for handicap vehicles. As a reminder, vehicles exiting the parish center grounds onto Sideburn Road on this driveway must turn right or risk being ticketed by the police.

9. Safety and Security: What will be the arrangements for safety and security?

Answer: Our Picnic HQs (discussed above) will be responsible for all aspects of the picnic, including security and safety. Our leadership team will have roving volunteers to assist with safety, parking and any other safety issues. All key leadership staff (identified by safety vests) will have small hand-held radios.

10. Location of First Aid:

Where will first aid support be available?

Answer: We will have health care professionals located in the outer foyer in the parish center to provide first aid.

11. Inclement Weather: What procedures will be implemented in the event of rainy or windy conditions?

Answer: We expect that many games and activities will be shifted to Saint Joseph's Hall in the parish center. This is a very large, carpeted space with lots of room to accommodate games, activities, picnic staff and picnic goers. The only activity we have planned in that space is our Family Bingo games. No matter what the weather, many of our food providers have sunk costs invested in their products; we sense an obligation to continue sales of such items inside the parish center to the maximum extent possible. The Knights' BBQ chicken and the baked goods store are in Farrell Hall, along with our ministry tables. Please pray for good weather!

12. Lost Parents: What should children do if their parents wander off?

Answer: Ask any picnic volunteer wearing a safety vest or other adult for help.

13. Lost and Found: Given the popularity of cell phones and tablets, what should attendees do if they lose or find any personal items?

Answer: Report the loss to the staff at the Picnic HQs tent located as discussed above.

14. What to Bring: What items should picnic goers consider bringing with them?

Answer: The parish center picnic area is largely composed of asphalt pavement with few grassy areas and shade. The pavement absorbs and reflects heat. Based on years of experience, here are some things to consider:

- *Sunscreen*
- *Picnic coolers*
- *Strollers*
- *Folding chairs*
- *Blankets for spreading out*
- *Pop up sun canopies that are self-supporting (i.e., do not need to be driven into the ground)*
- *Cash or a checkbook: most activities (except the Knights of Columbus) do not accept debit or credit cards or enable online purchases*

15. Gluten Products: Will non-gluten products be available?

Answer: It is difficult to have an overall answer, due to the variety of organizations involved in preparing and selling food items. The Bake Sale personnel do segregate gluten-free and nut-free items from the balance of the other baked goods. It would be best to ask at each of the sites offering food items about gluten sensitivity.

16. Pre-ordered Food: Will attendees be able to pre-order food?

Answer: Pre-ordering food is only available for chicken dinners sold by the Knights via an online application. Check the SMOS weekly bulletins for the ordering link, or individuals may pre-purchase meals at the parish center front office.

17. Hydration: What is planned in case of an unusually hot weather?

Answer: We will have several water distribution sites offering free bottles of bottled water as shown in the site map. In addition, areas inside the parish center (including Farrell Hall and Saint Joseph's Hall) are air-conditioned.

18. Eating Locations: Where may picnic goers eat?

Answer: Picnic-goers have several options for dining.

- *Many picnic simply goers spread a blanket in the limited number of shaded areas and eat picnic-style.*
- *The parish will position multiple wooden picnic tables (under sun canopies) in the driveway leading to the rear exit of Farrell Hall, including in the spaces where the priests normally park in front of wooden sheds.*
- *The parish will also set up round tables and folding chairs inside Farrell Hall where meals may be enjoyed.*