May 22, 2020

Dear St. Mary’s Parishioner,

This week we received the longed-for and exciting news that we can resume public celebrations of the Mass beginning Friday, May 29! I know that many of you have been anxious to return to Mass in person and have been longing to receive Jesus in the Eucharist once again. Unfortunately, given the ongoing threat of the coronavirus, it isn’t as easy as simply saying that Masses are going to resume as normal. We are obligated, in our duty to promote the common good, to make sure that the church is a safe place for everyone. While it is impossible to guarantee that nobody will contract the virus at church, we will do everything we can to reduce this possibility. This letter is to inform you of some of the changes you can expect when we return to Mass. If you wish to join us for Mass, please read this letter in its entirety!

One of the most important ways that you can make this new process go smoothly is to arrive to Mass EARLY! Getting everyone into their pew while maintaining six feet of separation will take extra time. Please try to be at church at least 10 minutes before Mass begins and keep spacing as you wait in line to enter.

One important item to note is that we are restricted to 25% of the church’s capacity, or in our case, 180 people. We will only be using every third pew for seating to help maintain social distancing, and both the cry room and chapel will be closed off due to the lack of air circulation in these rooms. Therefore, to make sure that we do not exceed capacity, everyone must register for an electronic “ticket” for the Mass you plan to attend. The easiest way to do this is to go to the parish website, www.stmarys1.org, click on Visit Our Church, and then you will notice a calendar along the left-hand side of the page if you scroll down. Select the date you want to attend and then click on the Register Now! button. You will then fill in your name and email address and indicate how many people will be attending with you. If you do not have access to a computer, please call Barb in the parish office during regular business hours and register over the phone.

Registering for Mass not only helps us prevent going over our capacity and having to turn people away, but it is vital for contact tracing. We receive a list of everyone who has registered for a given Mass, so if we later learn that someone at the Mass was diagnosed with COVID-19, we can contact everyone who was present to tell them and allow them to assess the next steps to take. That is why, if someone arrives who has not pre-registered, they will be sent to a table in the Gathering Space to register, even if there is plenty of space available. If you arrive without registering and there are no tickets available, there will be a few overflow seats in the gym, but you will need to register before taking a seat.

There will only be two entrances available for Mass! You must enter through the Gathering Space doors under either the north or south canopy. We are encouraging everyone who does not have physical limitations to enter through the south canopy from the main parking lot to allow those who have difficulty with stairs to use the north entrance. Please do your best to maintain six feet of separation between you and the people ahead of or behind you when entering and throughout your time in the church. You will be greeted by someone who will ask if you have registered and then directed to enter the church. We will not be taking up a collection during Mass, so there will also be a box at the entrance into which you can drop your donation.
It is diocesan policy that everyone over the age of two MUST wear a mask inside the church. Remember that this is to protect others from the possibility that you might be infected, so please take this requirement seriously and charitably. I understand that it might be difficult to keep a mask on a toddler, but we just ask that you do your best. Since everyone will be wearing masks, I encourage you not to try to sing and to offer your verbal responses in a low voice. This will help to prevent the spread of the virus by reducing the water droplets that we each expel. All the hymnals and cards have been removed from the pews to help limit the possibility of contamination as well.

Once you are inside the church, the available pews will be marked. We will have a total of thirty pews available so that we can keep people spaced at least 6 feet apart. We ask that larger families sit near the back in the larger pews, unless your family will fill an entire smaller pew. We must keep separation between families in each pew, so please make the best use of the limited space we have available. Please be flexible and patient during the first few Masses as we figure out how to get the most people into the space available.

At communion time there will be a limited number of communion stations available and the Precious Blood will not be distributed to the faithful. Please exit your pew and maintain six feet between you and the person in front of you. There will be tape markings on the floor to help you visualize 6 feet of separation. Keep your mask on until you are the next person in line to receive. Then respond Amen to “The Body of Christ,” remove your mask, and come forward to receive the Eucharist. You may receive in either the hand or on your tongue, but I STRONGLY encourage you to receive in your hand. Everyone may consider bringing hand sanitizer to use before communion. Sanitizer will be available at the entrances, and I will be sanitizing my hands before distributing communion and if I happen to touch anyone’s hand or tongue while giving Holy Communion.

At the conclusion of Mass, you may use any of the four exits to leave the church building, but I ask that you continue to maintain social distancing. Please keep six feet between you and the people who are around you as you leave. I ask you to be especially patient with each other as we learn this new routine. We are also looking for volunteers to help sanitize the church after each Mass so that it is safe for everyone arriving for the next liturgy. If you are willing to help with this, please contact Barb in the office.

Mass Schedule
Our weekend schedule will be as normal with a Saturday 4:30 pm vigil Mass and a 9 and 11 am Mass on Sunday. The weekday schedule beginning in June will be Tuesday-Friday at 8 am. We encourage those who are over 65 or who have health concerns that put you at a higher risk from COVID-19 to avoid these Masses for the time being. Everyone continues to be dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass through June 30, and I will continue to live stream each Mass on YouTube. Beginning June 4, I will be offering an 11 am Mass on Tuesday and Thursday especially for those who are older or at higher risk. Please consider coming at these times if you are in one of these categories.

Thank you for reading these guidelines! There are other things not listed here that you will discover when you arrive at church. Please be patient with us as we work through the new procedures and discover new and better ways of doing things. We will all be adjusting to a new normal, but I pray that we will all be thankful for the opportunity to gather and worship the Lord in church and offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass together once again!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Dave Gross
Pastor

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