

Dear Saint Mary's Parishioners:

Some news, some explanations, and some directives in anticipation of opening the church for Mass in the coming weeks:

First of all: the date, and the reason for this date.

Many of you are probably aware that Governor Ricketts announced that churches may resume worship services across the state on May 4th. It was unclear, however, whether or not this overrode county/city directives. Given that the number of new cases of Covid-19 continues to be on the increase, or at least steady, in Lancaster County, the Lincoln pastors agreed that it would be prudent for us to abide by the local directives; therefore, we will NOT be resuming open Masses until May 11th, which is a Monday.

On that day, Saint Mary's will resume our usual daily Mass schedule, at 12:10 pm and 7 pm. We will be observing social distancing, with available seating greatly reduced. We will use only one entrance (the east door facing K Street). We look forward to being able to accommodate around 42 to 50 people, but once we've reached capacity, we will have to turn people away, regrettably.

On the weekend of May 16th and 17th, we will resume our normal weekend Mass schedule, again with greatly reduced capacity. This does lead to the potential problem of people not only getting turned away from Mass, but getting turned away repeatedly, Mass after Mass. To alleviate this problem, we will be issuing passes for each Mass. We ask that parishioners especially email or call the rectory beginning May 5th, between 10 am and 8 pm, to reserve passes. You may do so Monday through Friday for the duration of the month of May, although you will have to commit to one particular Mass time on each weekend. If all those passes are gone, you will at least know which Masses still have space and be able to obtain a pass to that Mass. We will also have a record here, in case you forget to bring your pass with you on Sunday. Passes will be mailed out to those who request them.

For the weekend (and daily Masses as well) we will unlock ONE DOOR half an hour before Mass is scheduled to begin. There will be a volunteer there to check passes, and a waiting line to get in. Those who already have passes will be admitted in right away. Those without may obtain one of the remaining passes right there on the spot, and enter right away. If there are no remaining passes for that Mass, people may wait until 10 minutes before Mass to see if any pass-holders fail to show up. At 10 minutes before Mass, we will let people in first-come-first-serve. Once we then reach capacity, those left may then procure passes for any remaining Masses.

Please be aware that, in order to suppress unnecessary movement and to prevent spread of germs, the downstairs, including the restrooms, will be closed off. In order to have time to disinfect shared surfaces between Masses, we will keep the same weekend Mass schedule. However, IF NEEDED, I will add Masses on Sunday afternoon and evening.

We will try to keep everyone posted about further details. And if you are not getting this via email, and have an email address, please get it to us. Email is the most efficient way we have right now to communicate to everyone.

With my prayers and blessing, Father Doug Dietrich

Guidelines and Safety Measures for Parishioners During Reopening

SPECIFIC to Lancaster County

As of May 11, 2020, parishes and religious institutions in Lancaster County are permitted to gather for the celebration of liturgies while practicing appropriate behaviors for containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. These guidelines are subject to change in the event of new instructions from local or state health officials and the Office of the Bishop.

General Guidelines:

- The dispensation from the Sunday and Holy Day obligation remains in place.
- Gatherings are limited to the Sacred Liturgy, so all forms of public liturgies in churches are permitted.
- All other parish and school activities remain restricted, including after-Mass gatherings such as coffee and rolls, funeral luncheons, wedding receptions, etc. The Bishop has restricted outdoor Mass.

The following are encouraged to stay at home:

- The sick
- The elderly
- People with underlying medical conditions
- Family members who live with elderly people or those who are at risk
- People who have access to those at risk in nursing institutions
- People who have upper respiratory or flu like symptoms
- People who live with someone with upper respiratory or flu like symptoms
- People with COVID-19 or live with someone with COVID-19
- People who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19

Requested “Containment Practices” for those attending Mass:

- Family members sit together
- Sit in spaces measured out for social distancing
- Cough in your sleeve
- Place your contribution envelope in the basket provided as you enter or exit the church. The ushers will not “take up the collection” during Mass
- No hand holding during the Our Father
- Sign of Peace is omitted
- Form a single file line with 6-foot intervals when processing forward to receive Holy Communion
- Follow the instructions of the ushers
- Avoid gathering in the vestibule or near the doors of the church following Mass
- If requested, assist with sanitizing the church and other public areas following Mass