

COVID UPDATE from the Pastor

As most of you know, the COVID dial in Lincoln is in the severe zone, and in fact, the virus appears to be spreading at an alarming rate. Until told to do so by the Diocese, we will NOT curtail Masses or confessions. However, we will be following the following protocol (many of them already in place):

- Disinfecting pews and door handles after each Mass
- No shared objects such as hymnals
- No social activities (for now)
- Meetings of more than 10 should be done on-line until the Lincoln COVID Dial is out of the red zone.
- We do not have the personnel to sanitize the restrooms on weekends. Please use the restroom at home BEFORE coming to Mass. If you know that you will have to use restroom, you may want to consider not coming to Mass right now, at least until the COVID dial goes down.
- Priests and acolytes will either wash or sanitize their hands immediately before distributing communion.
- NO CONGREGATIONAL SINGING. This is new, and recently mandated by the Diocese. We will still be having the usual hymns, but they will be sung only by the cantors. Please "actively participate" by listening intently and truly paying attention to the words.
- We prefer at this time that communicants receive—*CAREFULLY*—on the hand rather than on the tongue. Please lower your mask as the person ahead of you receives communion, and replace your mask after you have placed the Sacred Host in your mouth. Note: those who insist on receiving only on the tongue will still be able to do so; we simply ask that they avoid the east nave.

And then there's the Mask Controversy...

The Department of Health requires that all people in public places who are unable to keep six feet distance from others are required to wear a mask while in such places. We understand that there are many people who disagree with this directive, but it is the law; and we understand that many people are opposed to such mandates as a violation of their civil liberties, that there's no proof that masks are effective anyway, etc. *Got it.* But...we have several people who are comfortable coming to Mass **ONLY** if others are masked up, and we want them to be here and to feel safe. Say what you want about the pandemic, the virus itself is real, it's contagious, and for a certain portion of the population, it's also dangerous. Take it from your pastor: none of you want a serious case of this, and it can hit anyone. I hadn't had a sick day in ten years before it took me down for two weeks.

So, here's the rule at Saint Mary's, especially while we're "in the red zone."

Any who for **WHATEVER** reasons (and we won't ask), cannot wear masks, we ask that you sit in the west section of pews (the pews in front of the pulpit).

We ask that those who are being particularly cautious, and who want not only to have mask wearing enforced, but also communion on the hand enforced, keep to the **EAST** set of pews.

Thus, the three sections of pews will be configured as follows:

East section (in front of the Mary Statue): all wearing masks, all receiving on the hand

Middle section: all wearing masks

West section: thank you for respecting the concerns of others.

I understand that these guidelines may mean that some people will have to sit in different places than they are accustomed to. Hopefully, that will be the greatest burden placed upon us for the remainder of this pandemic.

FROM THE PASTOR: UPDATES ON PARISH PROJECTS

We have completed some significant projects this week to make Saint Mary's Parish plant more safe and secure. I wish to give a brief explanation on what has been done, and why. Please note that all projects were presented first to Saint Mary's Parish Council and were approved by the Council. Also, none of the expenses are coming out of our general funds, but are coming from donors or from parish groups who have money which was raised by them.

NEW FENCE

Fences have been put up in the breezeway between the rectory and the church. This was done to give the priests an outdoor area with some privacy and also to direct rectory door traffic to the front. We have had people ringing different doorbells during the night; it is risky enough to answer the door at 3 am, much less at a door that is out of view or possible on-lookers. Moreover, during the day we would often have traffic at different doors, with only one person to answer them. Access is still available to the church, although we encourage people, particularly on Sundays, to take advantage of the multiple south entrances and the gate at the southwest corner of the parking lot.

SECURITY CAMERAS

You will notice several security cameras that are in place. This allows us to view from the rectory activity going on in the church, particularly during those hours when the church is empty. Although the restricted hours of access during COVID have greatly curtailed the amount of suspicious activity in the church, we believe this will give us a greater feeling of safety—and should do the same for those who would like to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament during the day.

RE-KEYING

The rectory and the church have both been rekeyed, in order to simplify our keying system but also for security. For the church, there is now a master key which opens all the doors, inside and out; only the priests and employees will have that key. Volunteers may have the key to all the inside doors. Access to the inside of the church, whether for prayer, work, or meetings, can be gained through the front door facing K Street furthest to the east. Please see or call Father Dietrich for the code. Access will be from 7 am to 8 pm. The keypad will not allow entry overnight.

HOURS

- The church will be open from 7 am to 8 pm, 7 days a week, via the keypad
- All doors will be unlocked for weekend Masses
- East doors near the basement steps will be unlocked for confessions
- Front doors will be unlocked for 12:10 Mass
- The keypad door will be unlocked for 7 pm Mass
- Doors will be unlocked one hour before Masses, half an hour before confessions.