

June 7, 2020
Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am pleased to share with you a letter from our bishop announcing Phase II of the opening up of Masses to greater numbers of parishioners, beginning this coming weekend, June 13-14 (enclosed). The guidelines to pastors the Bishop references will necessarily have to be adapted to each parish's particular circumstances. In this letter I want to share with you what Phase II will look like at St. Mary's.

First, some reminders and information.

- The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation *remains in effect until further notice*. However, the Bishop writes in the guidelines, even when unable to attend Sunday Mass “the faithful are to keep the Lord’s Day holy by some other means. For example, they should tune in to a live-streamed Mass and are also encouraged to pray the Liturgy of the Hours or read and reflect on Sacred Scripture or pray the Rosary or some other devotion.”
- “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). For your own good and out of love for your neighbor, if you are unwell or have some symptoms of the COVID-19 virus it is *critical* that you stay at home.
- All Masses (daily and Sunday) will continue to be live-streamed to the parish Facebook page and then posted on the parish website. *Holy Communion will no longer be distributed in the parking lot following the weekend Masses.*
- These guidelines were prepared with the assistance of the Department of Infectious Diseases of our sponsored hospital, St. Peter’s University Hospital in New Brunswick.
- We will be able to have up to 162 people (30% of the church’s capacity) at each of our current weekend Masses (4 pm on Saturday and 10 am on Sunday). We will wait to see if additional Masses need to be added.
- Parishioners in vulnerable categories, e.g., advanced age, an underlying health condition, should consider attending instead a daily Mass, where there are fewer people present.

- For the common good and to ease safety concerns, the church will be professionally sanitized after each weekend Mass. This will entail an unexpected expense, but I believe it is money well spent.
- The opening up of our daily Mass presents slightly different challenges, and since I have been concentrating on the details of the restoration of our Sunday Masses, the current procedure for attendance at daily Mass will continue for a little while longer, with the exception that 12 people can now be accommodated at the weekday 8 am Mass.

§ Pre-Arrival

- As I write, feelings about gathering in public places seem to vary greatly, so that we have no good idea about what to expect this weekend. If you are likely to attend one of the Masses, would you kindly indicate that either on Flocknote, the link on the parish website or contacting the Parish Office (908-756-6524, x10; parish@stmaryswatchung.org)? It will be of great assistance in helping us to prepare.

§ Arrival

- Greeters will be outside the church to welcome you and answer any questions you may have.
 - *The use of face masks are expected* except for the very young (parents are in the best position to determine if their child is capable of wearing a mask).
 - The one restroom off the narthex is to be used for emergencies only.
 - Proceed directly through the narthex into the church; there should be no congregating in the narthex.
- Once inside the church, an usher will direct you to one of the pews reserved for congregational seating. It is very possible you may not be able to sit where you normally do.
 - Hymnals and *Breaking Bread* books have been removed. As we are able to introduce communal singing, disposable worship aids will be available.
 - Baskets for your weekly offering will also be available as you enter the church.

§ The Celebration of Mass

- Some elements of Mass will necessarily have to be temporarily adapted or eliminated in our current circumstances:

- Except for within families, shaking hands at the Sign of Peace is to be replaced by a gesture that does not involve physical contact, such as a bow or nod or a simple wave.
- Communion under the form of the Precious Blood of Christ remains temporarily suspended.
- Out of sensitivity to those parishioners who must watch Mass from their homes, Holy Communion will be distributed after the final blessing. The procedure for receiving Communion will be explained at that time.
- In consideration of your own health, and the health of the persons distributing Holy Communion, the Bishop is requesting that all receive Communion *in the hand*. *The reception of Communion in the hand is equally as devout as receiving on the tongue.*
- Following the reception of Holy Communion, you are asked to proceed immediately out of the church. Again, there should be no congregating in the narthex.

This weekend we will celebrate Mass in our church as it has never been celebrated before. Please pray this week that the Blessed Trinity increase our faith and bestow on our parish the virtues of patience and charity.

Yours in Christ,

Msgr. Benwell

Postscript: on another topic of importance, Bishop Checchio has directed a time of sustained prayer during this month of June, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to bring racial harmony, healing and peace to our nation. You are invited to participate in the celebration of Evening Prayer every Friday evening in June at 5 pm. The livestream will be available from our diocesan website (www.diometuchen.org); Facebook page (www.facebook.com/diocesemetuchen); and YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfZxhfagxVupdosF1uKpSxA>).