

Newman Center Re-Opening Guidelines

In accordance with the Diocese of Youngstown reopening directives, the University Parish Newman Center will begin offering Sunday Masses on Sunday, May 31, the Solemnity of Pentecost, at 9 am and 11 am. This letter outlines the changes that we will be implementing in order to comply with the safety guidelines recommended by the State of Ohio, the liturgical directives from the Diocese of Youngstown, and the needs/limitations of our parish setting.

Before proceeding to the specifics, please keep the following in mind:

1. The pandemic is not over, and attending Mass will not be free of risk of contracting Covid-19.
2. The general dispensation from the Sunday obligation continues for the foreseeable future. No one should feel compelled to attend Mass, especially persons at risk of severe health complications associated with contracting Covid-19.
3. We are asking persons over the age of 65 to refrain from attending Mass. We recognize that this is the age group that is often most faithful in their practice, but we are sincerely concerned about the safety of our older parishioners.
4. If you are ill or do not feel well, please do not come to Mass.
5. The Chapel looks different. Your experience of Mass will be different. None of us has ever done this before. We will have to adjust as we continue to adapt in this time of pandemic. Be patient with the staff and with each other. Above all, exhibit charity and kindness.
6. We ask all parishioners to wear a mask at all times, except during the reception of communion. Wearing a mask is not for your safety, but for the safety of your fellow parishioners. Remember, our pastor is in the high risk category and there are no replacements for him waiting in the wings.

We understand that the virus can be transmitted in two ways: through airborne droplets and contact with hard surfaces where the virus can survive for a period of time. Our procedures and practices will reflect our attempt to limit potential spread of the virus in either manner.

Reduction of hard contact surfaces:

1. Only the chapel will be accessible during Sunday Mass. The social hall, offices and bathrooms will not be available for use before, during, or after Mass. If you must use the restroom during Mass, the bathroom in the Narthex area will be available for use.
2. Hand sanitizer will be available throughout the Chapel.

3. The use of devotional candles is suspended.
4. Hymnals and paper materials have been removed from the church.
5. The chapel will be cleaned between Masses. **We need volunteers to help with this new “ministry of cleaning” following the 9 am Mass.** Please contact the parish office if you can help.

Reduction of airborne spread:

1. Masks: Wear them, please!
2. Limiting attendance: Current recommendations are 50% capacity with proper social spacing. Rather than thinking of our capacity in numbers of bodies, it is more realistic in our setting to think in terms of family units. For the purposes of our planning we consider a family unit to be 1-5 persons than can sit together. Due to the intimate nature of our worship space, we feel that we can only accommodate **30 families per Mass.**
3. Reduced number of liturgical ministers:
 - a. Only one lector per Mass.
 - b. Two Eucharistic Ministers per Mass
 - c. No choir or instrumentalists except staff
 - d. No liturgy coordinators or servers.
 - e. No gift bearers. Ideally the collection will be taken up by the greeters/ushers.
4. Increased use of greeters/ushers: we will need two (2) greeters/ushers per Mass.
5. Limited singing: If for some reason you are not wearing a mass, **do not sing.** The current scientific studies on “super-spreading” by un-masked singing are alarming.
6. No Exchange of Peace or hand holding during the “Our Father.”
7. No communion on the tongue: diocesan directives state that **only priests** may offer communion on the tongue. Due to Fr. Steve being in the “high-risk” category, he **will not** be distributing communion except to the Eucharistic ministers, ushers, and musicians.
8. The use of the common cup has been suspended. Remember that Eucharist is complete under either species. For special concerns, please contact Fr. Steve.
9. No congregating in the narthex.

Coming to Mass

1. Doors will be open for Mass approximately 30 minutes before the start of Mass.
2. Only one door will be open for entering the Chapel. You will be greeted at the door of the Chapel by an usher who will escort you to your seat. It will be much like wedding seating. We will fill the Chapel from the sanctuary to the back, so it is likely you will not be seated in your preferred place.
3. If you are not immediately greeted, **do not enter the Chapel**. Wait for the greeter to return to seat you.
4. Mass attendance is first come, first served. When the Chapel reaches capacity, no one else will be allowed to enter.
5. Once in your seats, please remain there until the distribution of the Eucharist.
6. Ushers will dismiss pews in an orderly fashion for the reception of the Eucharist. Please be careful to maintain proper social distancing from those not in your family group.
7. Masks may be lowered for the reception of the Eucharist, but should be replaced immediately thereafter.
8. At the conclusion of Mass, ushers will dismiss pews from the back of the church to the sanctuary (think wedding, again). Do not remain in the narthex but exit the Chapel immediately. If you absolutely must greet someone sitting elsewhere in the Chapel, meet them outside.
9. Those assisting in cleaning the Chapel may remain in their seats at dismissal until the Chapel has cleared out and cleaning may begin.

We recognize that many of these directives are the antithesis of our experience as community. We realize that separation from the Eucharist and community is a grievous loss for many so we are trying to balance the right of access to the sacraments with the Catholic ethos of protecting the weakest among us. The things that make this community the special place that it is are also the things that make us most vulnerable to spreading Covid-19.

This situation isn't forever, it is for right now. We expect to adapt these procedures as necessary. As mentioned before, none of us has ever done this before! As we can only accommodate 60 families per weekend, our feelings won't be hurt if you elect to remain at home or choose to attend Mass in a larger space, although you should contact the church in question to see how they are handling attendance.

We thank you for your continued support during this difficult time. Know that we are praying for you and that we, too, long to be with our fellow parishioners and friends. May the Lord Jesus Christ keep us all safe!