

May 24, 2020

Reopening St. Robert Bellarmine Church 02919

1. Catholics will continue to be dispensed from Sunday Mass and Holy Day Masses.

- Be reminded that your attendance at and participation in Mass is voluntary.
- No one, should feel obligated or pressured to attend and participate.
- Please be reminded that vulnerable populations, the elderly, and those with underlying health conditions are encouraged to follow the most up to date health regulations and remain at home

2. Mass will be live-streamed from the parish on an ongoing basis.

- Beginning Saturday, May 30th, the 5:00 PM Vigil Mass, as opposed to the 10:00 AM Mass on Sundays, will be live-streamed. The recording of the Mass will remain on Facebook. Also, the recording will be accessible for your spiritual nourishment via our parish's website for seven days.

3. Access to Mass will be limited

- We will be reopening in accordance with an incremental approach so as to give parish staff and volunteers the opportunity to gain experience with managing not only the process of welcoming, seating and sending forth those who attend but also the process of cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing the church.

The current Weekend Mass Schedule is as follows:

Saturday Vigil: 5:00pm

Sunday: 8:00 AM, 10:00 AM and 12:00 PM.

If you are interested in having a seat set aside for you, for Saturday evening or Sunday Masses, please contact the rectory at 401-232-5600 after 9:00 AM on the Wednesday, and through 4:00 PM on the Friday, before the weekend during which you wish to attend Mass.

- In consideration of the metric of the 25% of the fire code capacity, in conjunction with social distancing guidelines, we are looking at a number of 70 people inside the church at one time.
- Be reminded that the overall number includes the priest, the deacon, the musicians and vocalist, parish volunteers etc.

- Now given the fact that those who live in the same household may sit together, we may be able to accommodate more people. However, it is important to remember that there must be at least six feet between each person in a pew. In other words, if a four-person family comes together – there must be at least six feet between that “group of four people” and let’s say one other person who may be at the other end of the same pew.
- While we are looking at the possibility of making use of an online reservation system (i.e. “event brite”) for now, parishioners will be invited to call, not email, but call the rectory, to express interest in having a seat or seats set aside.

Priority will be given to those families who have, prior to the date and time of the Mass, arranged for the soul of a deceased loved one to be prayed for at a particular Mass.

- Each weekend, you may begin calling the rectory after 9:00 AM on the **Wednesday, prior to the weekend**. If you call before that time, your name will not be put on a list. If you call after 9:00 AM on Wednesday and no one answers, you may leave a message, but don’t presume that there will be a space for you. Someone will get back to you to let you know as to whether or not there is a space for you.
- Lastly, be mindful, that if you have the opportunity to attend Mass one weekend, you will likely not be given another opportunity to do so until a few weekends have passed. We want to be sure that all those who want to attend are given the equal opportunity to do so on a regular basis.

4. Hand hygiene and masks are key

- Parishioners will be expected to sanitize their hands immediately upon entry to the church. You will also have the opportunity to sanitize your hands prior to leaving the church.
- Likewise, parishioners must wear a mask at all times, with the exception of when it is time to receive Holy Communion.
- However, with all of this in mind, it would be most helpful if you could plan ahead and bring your own supply – perhaps a personal size container in your pocket or bag.
- This could be used upon entry into the church, prior to the reception of Holy Communion and upon leaving the church.

5. Pews will be sectioned off.

In order to maintain six feet distance between parishioners, parishes will mark off sections of pews where parishioners can safely sit. Here at St. Roberts, every other pew will be taped off so that no one will be able to sit in it. Also, you can expect to see markings with measurements along the top of each pew that will be in use. For sure, there are many ways to go about making the markings on the pews.

What we are going to do here at St. Robert's is this:

- We are going to put long strips of painters' tape along the top of the pews.
- Then on the tape, from one end of the pew to the other, the pews will be marked in "12 inch"/ "one foot" increments (i.e. 1 foot, two feet, three feet four feet etc.)
- If you and a member of your household come together, and you for example take up the first 3 feet of that pew, the next person that sits in that same pew would have to be seated in the area designated by the marking that reads 9 feet. For sure, this will take a bit of getting used to. However, not to worry, there will be volunteer parishioners trained to assist in this regard.
- Again, by way of reminder, you will not be able to choose your seat, but rather you will be directed to a particular space so that the church may be filled in a manner that is as timely, efficient and safe as possible.
- If the family/crying room remains opened, it will be limited to only one family and the door to the room will remain opened.
- Also, people should plan on arriving early to the church, for example, 20 -30 minutes early, so that all seating can be taken care of prior to the start of Mass.
- People will be expected to maintain social distance of 6 feet even while waiting to enter the church.
- There will be hospitality ministers here at the parish to welcome and greet you and check your name on the list as you arrive.
- When you arrive, if there is a large crowd of people waiting to enter, please be mindful of the need to social distance six feet.
- You might even consider waiting in your vehicle until there are fewer people waiting to enter the church.
- For sure, when it comes to entering the church and being seated, every ones' patience, understanding, cooperation and flexibility will be of the utmost importance.

6 Singing will be limited

- Because of the risk of infection due to increased aerosolized particles, singing must be limited.
- In fact, Tom as the vocalist must be kept 14 feet away from others here in the church.
- As a result, the two small sections of pews around the organ and keyboard will not be available for use.
- Be informed that Hymnals have been removed from the church.
- Also, the missalettes with the readings and prayers such as the Gloria and Creed have been removed from the church.

- However, you are welcome to bring your personal copy of a publication that has the daily readings (i.e., Magnificat).
- For your convenience, we here at the parish have purchased new, never used, individual 6 x 9 cards, that have the Mass responses and prayers such as the Gloria and Creed printed on them.
- You may take one the first time you come back to Mass.
- However, we would expect that you take the card home with you and then bring it back with you the next time you come to Mass. It would be a great challenge to provide you with a new card each time you come to Mass.
- Also, in this regard, please be sure that whatever you take in with you, leaves with you upon your departure from your pew and the church.

7. Parishioners will have the opportunity to receive Holy Communion in a safe manner

- **All parishioners who wish to receive Holy Communion are strongly encouraged to receive in the hand.**
- As they approach the priest or minister, while in line and waiting to receive Holy Communion, communicants will continue to wear their masks, and the priest or other minister will wear a mask when distributing Holy Communion.
- While the use of Extra Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion is an allowed option, here at St. Robert Bellarmine, at least initially, only the priest celebrant will be the one from whom you will receive the Eucharist. Priests and deacons of advanced age, or those at high risk due to some medical condition, are strongly encouraged to refrain from taking part in the reception of Holy Communion.
- The priest will always sanitize his hands before the distribution of Holy Communion and whenever his hand(s) inadvertently comes into contact with another person.
- Communicants who are planning to receive Holy Communion in the hand are encouraged to once again sanitize their hands prior to the reception of Holy Communion.
- Having a personal supply of hand sanitizer on your person would make this practice easier to accomplish.
- Those who choose to receive in the hand should be wearing their masks even until the moment that they are standing directly in front of the minister.
- **While still wearing their masks, communicants should extend their hands as far as possible out in front them to receive Holy Communion in the hand.**
- **With open hands, communicants should rest their non-dominant hand onto/into their dominant hand so that the Sacred Host may be placed onto the open hand as if onto a throne.** The priest or

minister says "The Body of Christ" and thereafter the communicant says Amen. The Sacred Host is then placed in the hand of the communicant.

- Thereafter, the communicant should remove part of his or her mask and then reverently consume the Sacred Host.
- Immediately following the consumption of the host, the communicant should put their mask back on and then return to his or her pew.
- Per diocesan directives, communicants will not be permitted to receive the Eucharist with gloved hands.
- For those who do not feel comfortable receiving Holy Communion at all at this time, know and be assured that refraining from reception of Holy Communion is an acceptable option. You will have the opportunity to make a spiritual communion.
- People have asked about the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue. It is my understanding that in some dioceses throughout the country, the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue has been suspended. In consideration of Church history and with regard and respect for this traditional, but not original, way, of receiving Holy Communion, it is my understanding that the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue has not been suspended here in the Diocese of Providence. With that said, reception of Holy Communion on the tongue will certainly be an option here at the parish. However, it may be helpful for those who wish to receive on the tongue to kindly consider doing so by waiting until the end of the line after those who receive in the hand.
- Those who choose to receive on the tongue should be wearing their masks even until the moment that they are standing directly in front of the minister. The priest or minister says "The Body of Christ" and thereafter the communicant says "Amen". The communicant should then remove at least part of his or her mask. Please allow the minister to focus on and control the action of placing the Sacred Host on the tongue. This means that the communicant should refrain from moving at all, hold his or her head still, extend their tongue out and beyond the borders of the lips and allow the Sacred Host to be placed on the tongue. Immediately following the reception of the Sacred Host, the communicant should put their mask back on and then return to his or her pew.
- In this regard, in an abundance of caution, please know that I will be using hand sanitizer after each person who receives on the tongue. Also, in consideration of this most important topic, please know, that should my finger or fingers make direct contact with anyone's lips or tongue, I will respectfully, prayerfully and temporarily pause the communion line, repose the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, go to the sacristy to wash my hands with soap and

hot water, and then return so that the remainder of the faithful who desire to receive holy communion may do so as safely as possible.

- Lastly, we will be expected to maintain social distance of six feet even in the communion line. There will be markings on floor to assist in this regard. Also, ushers and other hospitality ministers will help in this regard as needed.

8. The church will be sanitized after every Mass

- To ensure everyone's safety, parish staff and volunteers will sanitize commonly touched surfaces and pews before and after every celebration of Mass. For sure, different parishes will handling this most important requirement and expectation in different ways. Here at St. Robert Bellarmine, I want be people to be assured that we will be sanitizing and disinfecting in accordance with a specific protocol developed by a parishioner who is a professional in the area of commercial cleaning. In the midst of the covid-19 crisis, he has already been involved in and has overseen the cleaning, disinfecting and sanitization of other public buildings and offices.
- It is important that we here at St. Robert Bellarmine have a sanitization protocol in place first and foremost so as to make our worship space as safe as possible for all. In addition, it is important that we have a protocol in place should any questions be asked of us by the RI Department of Health etc.
- Especially during this time, we ask that parents refrain from bringing any food or snacks into the church for children.
- Also, the protocol that will be in place will be one that is designed to effectively sanitize and disinfect the pews while at the same time causing minimal damage to the wood.
- In regard to the restrooms, while some parishes might be making their restrooms unavailable, here at St. Robert Bellarmine, if the doors to the church are going to be unlocked, then the doors to the restrooms will also be unlocked.
- The restrooms will be cleaned, sanitized and disinfected on a regular basis between the Masses.
- However, be mindful that despite the fact that two people could typically be using the restroom at the same time, in the current climate in which we find ourselves, please be sure that only one person is in the restroom at a time. Of course, two members from the same household could be in the restroom at the same time.
- Also, people must maintain social distance of six feet while waiting to use the restroom.
- Parents, please accompany your children to the restroom as necessary.

9. Any budget envelopes or offering may be submitted prior to Mass or as you leave

- Instead of "passing the basket," a receptacle will be available in the center aisle so parishioners can drop off their budget envelopes or loose offerings before or after Mass.
- By way of reminder, offerings may still be made by dropping them off at the rectory, mailing them into the rectory or by way of your bank's online bill pay system.
- **You may also take advantage of the recently initiated online/electronic giving program here at the parish. To do so, visit our parish's website at "strobertsparish.org" and click on the link for ParishSOFT.**
- As always, know that your financial support is very much appreciated and necessary so as to meet the regular and unexpected operating expenses here at the parish. Many people have continued to be generous to the parish throughout the crisis. Know that we are grateful.

10. Avoid personal/physical contact with anyone

- The sign of peace remains suspended.
- Physical contact with people who live outside your household must be avoided at all costs.
- Here at St. Robert Bellarmine, people typically appreciate the opportunity to hug and embrace and exchange other types of physical greetings and expression of friendship, care and concern. For the time being, and until further notice, people should refrain from any physical contact with those who live outside of one's household.
- Also, after the final blessing and sending forth, people will be assisted in leaving the church in an orderly and sequential manner while maintaining social distance of six feet. We ask that you kindly wait for and adhere to instructions that will be provided at the end of Mass.
- Lastly, once you leave the church building, we ask that you not congregate and socialize in the parking lot and that you enter your vehicle and leave the grounds of the parish as soon as possible.

11. Those who are sick must stay home

- Anyone who has symptoms of any sickness (even mild symptoms) must stay at home. People who come to church will be expected to self-monitor and self-screen before coming to Mass.
- That means people should be taking their temperature and monitoring for other signs and symptoms, not only of coronavirus, but also of any other type of illness.
- Even if you have called ahead and presumably have a place waiting for you here at the church, if you have even the mildest of symptoms of illness, as an act of love, care and concern for yourself and others, we ask that you stay at

home and consider seeking medical care and testing as necessary. Of course, decisions regarding medical care or testing need to be made in conjunction with your physician.

- In this regard, know that the same will apply to me as your pastor and parish priest. Please know, for example, that if I happen to wake up one morning and am experiencing any fever or other symptoms of illness, even mild ones, I am required to refrain from celebrating Mass in public. What does this mean? This means, that in the event that I am not well, and am at the same time not able to find another priest to offer and celebrate Mass in my place, then a Mass or perhaps all the Masses that day will have to be cancelled.

12. Offertory and Mass Intentions

- Those for whom we have been asked to pray will be prayed for during the celebration of public Mass.
- Names will be published in the online bulletin and in the hard-copy bulletin once we go back to distributing them.
- However, there will be no offertory procession with gifts of bread and wine. The bread and wine will be placed in the sanctuary at start of mass

13. Daily Mass

Starting on June 1st, weekday Mass on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays will be celebrated at 8:00 AM. Due to possible Funeral Masses at 10:00 AM, and the time that will be required to clean and sanitize the church after daily Mass, it would be imprudent to think that one could do what needs to be done in a timely manner if morning Mass remains at 9:00 AM.

Very likely, there is not going to be a need to call ahead for daily Mass. However, if the needs to do so presents itself, we will go in that direction.

I know this is a lot of information. For sure there will be questions.

Feel free to send me your questions.

I will do the best I can to answer them.

Yet above all, know that we look forward to seeing you here at the parish.

Of course, even with the best of plans in place, when we gather together here at church or anywhere for that matter, we can never eliminate the risk associated with the possibility of contracting coronavirus or any other related illness.

Yet, we can collectively do all we can together, to minimize the risks.

Know that here at the parish, we are positively committed to doing all we can to prevent anyone from becoming COVID-19 positive.

We are counting on you to join us in being collaborative, observant, vigilant, involved and diligent in regard to the efforts that are being made to make our worship space as safe as possible for all.

Peace, Health and Prayers, Fr. Richard