

## “REOPENING” – BIT BY BIT

If you’ve been following these regular updates, you should have an understanding of the long, slow process we’ve had to follow in order to begin reopening the church for anything at all. I know you probably see news of other churches opening up sooner, but the obstacle for us was finding just five parishioners – under the age of 65 – who were willing to step forward to lead the reopening process. It was only a short time ago that our leadership team was completed, and I’m so very grateful to **Karen Shifflett** (our DRE), **Dave Wolken**, **Jim Wright**, **Michael Cap** and **Steve McDowell** who comprise that team. Karen, Jim & Mike then had to recruit others to help with set-up, greeting and sanitizing; but we are still short of **greeters** and **set-up** volunteers. Unfortunately, greeters are still expected to be in the under-65 age group, though exceptions can be made if you are in reasonably good health and “understand the risks.” If you feel could help with **greeting**, you can contact Jim directly at [wright1817@sbcglobal.net](mailto:wright1817@sbcglobal.net) or for **set-up**, contact Karen at [knshifflett@gmail.com](mailto:knshifflett@gmail.com).

You might also have heard of churches scheduling “drive-in” masses (ah, I remember the 50’s & 60’s at the *41 Drive-In* in Hammond, IN.). But trying to keep up with the rules of the Archdiocese is like trying to jump on a moving train. The approval for “drive-in” masses arrived on Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup> (I’m writing this on the 13<sup>th</sup>); how any parish could arrange for that the same weekend, especially since numbers were still limited, is beyond me. At any rate, no parish can schedule masses of any kind for any number of people until “phase one” has been completed, and that involves scheduling three, non-Eucharistic prayer times for a maximum of 10 people. That’s the point at which we’ve finally arrived after being “certified” by the Archdiocese for this first “phase.”

So, next weekend – Friday, Saturday & Sunday – we will schedule two-hour blocks for prayer each day from 10:00a.m. to Noon. **Friday, June 19** is the *Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, a perfect day for Eucharistic Adoration. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament will take place shortly after 10a.m. with Benediction shortly before noon. **Saturday, June 20** is the *Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, an ideal time to pray the Rosary, and that will take place each half hour beginning at 10a.m. Finally, since **June 21** is *Father’s Day*, that will be an appropriate time to pray for the fathers of our parish, both living and deceased. That’s the good news; now here’s the challenging part of it all. As we begin this reopening, only **10 people** can be in the church at any one time. So there will be **25 minute increments** beginning at **10:00, 10:30, 11:00 and 11:30** each morning, and those who wish to come will have to **sign up online** at a site called “**sign-up genius**” which you will find shortly on our website, [stjoehomewood.org](http://stjoehomewood.org). And I’d ask you to be aware of friends or neighbors who don’t have e-mail or internet access; you may register for them, but you must register **each person by name**, whether a family member or friend, not just the number wishing to attend. However, the Archdiocese is still asking those in “vulnerable populations” to consider remaining at home for the foreseeable future – but I leave that to your judgment and good sense.

Now, there are a few more important points to consider, and I can only ask for your understanding and patience with all of this; it falls under the category of “don’t shoot the messenger” since I didn’t make up any of these rules! You may only enter the church by the **main center doors** on Dixie Hwy. and you must wear a **mask**. Greeters will be present to ensure that you use **hand sanitizer** as you enter the church, and you will be escorted to a seat that allows for social distancing; you may not sit wherever you wish at this point, though the designated seats will be toward the front of the church. If you are with another member of your household, you may sit together. After 25 minutes you will be reminded that is time to leave, and you must exit through the **north or south main doors** on Dixie Hwy. so that those waiting to enter can use the center doors; all the doors will be labeled accordingly. Finally, please DO NOT just show up because, as harsh as it sounds, you won’t be allowed to enter the church if you did not register online.

Once we’ve completed this first phase, we must apply to the Archdiocese for the next certification which will allow us to open for masses with a **limit of 50 persons**. Because of the requirement for the church to be not just cleaned but completely sanitized after each mass, our regular mass schedule will not resume for some time. So, whenever we have received that certification and are able to announce the resumption of masses, the weekend masses will be on **Saturday at 5:15p.m.** (no need to change that, since there’s no urgency about completing the sanitizing) and on **Sundays at 8:00 and 10:30a.m.** because of the time needed to sanitize. Weekday masses will resume sometime after that, but the Saturday morning mass will not resume until further notice to limit the burden that is being placed on those who are so generously offering their help with all of this.

So, **when will this begin?** My faint hope would be the last weekend of June, but that would require a quick certification from the Archdiocese which is doubtful. If we can’t begin masses on June 27-28, we’ll announce other times for private prayer that weekend. The first weekend of July, Independence Day weekend, would be more likely for the resumption of masses with the **50 person limit**; and that would also be the time when **funerals** can resume with the same participation limits. After that, we need another certification to allow approximately **135 people** to attend each of those three weekend masses. And as long as the laborious sanitizing is required after each mass, our regular Sunday schedule cannot resume. Finally, please note: **online registration** will be required at all these stages if you wish to attend mass. There are two reasons for that: one is the number limit; the other is “contact tracing” because your contact information must be kept for 14 days in the event that someone who attended a mass is diagnosed with the virus, at which point all who attended that mass would need to be contacted, tested and possibly quarantined. Again, don’t shoot the messenger!

Once we are approved for the 50 person limit (which only needs to last for one weekend), additional information will be posted on the parish website which will describe “what you can expect” when you come to mass. Among those “expectations” will be no singing (the hymnals are being removed from the pews, but we can have a cantor and accompanist), a single file line for communion with hand sanitizer provided before you receive communion (only in the hand), masks & social distancing (of course), short homilies (hurray?) and dismissal pew by pew by the ushers – for us, only through the Dixie Hwy. doors.

Now if you think this took a long time to read, consider how long it took to write and edit it, not to mention how long it takes to read and digest all the rules from the Archdiocese. Once again, I’m immensely grateful to the members of the “reopening team” I identified above who have been so generous, conscientious and proactive in making it possible for us to finally reach this point—baby steps, to be sure, but necessary ones. Remember, if you can help with set-up or greeting, please contact Karen or Jim at the addresses I provided above. And as we continue to take these small steps, remember that Cardinal Cupich has suspended indefinitely the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, particularly for those in the “vulnerable” categories of age or illness and, of course, because of the number limits currently in place. We’ll all be together again – one of these days – here on earth, and hopefully one day in heaven as well.

Fr. Bob

**REGISTRATION FOR ADORATION OF THE BLESSED  
SACRAMENT, THE ROSARY AND PRIVATE PRAYER  
JUNE 19, 20 & 21**

