

July, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

I am very pleased to announce that St. Thomas the Apostle parish will be reopening for Masses on the weekend of July 25 and 26. Our Saturday Mass will be at 5 p.m. and until further notice we will have one Sunday Mass at 10 a.m. We have missed you, and having heard from so many of you, know that you have been waiting for this time to come. We also understand that some people are not ready to attend Mass due to underlying health conditions, or concerns about the COVID-19 virus and being in a group setting. Please remember that there continues to be a dispensation from attending Mass in the Albany Diocese. When you are able to come back, we will be here to welcome you!

Before your return, we wanted to give you our parish plan, which follows, so you will know what to expect. (And, as this plan evolves, due to our needs and changing guidelines, please continue to monitor our website, [www.stthomas-church.org](http://www.stthomas-church.org) for updates) Key points to remember:

***Most importantly, please remember that you need to wear a mask or facial covering, and please bring a personal supply of hand sanitizer.***

***Before Mass***

***--To accommodate all of the new requirements, be sure to arrive for Mass 30 minutes before the start of Mass.***

--All Mass attendees **must maintain social distancing, and wear masks**, as they leave their cars and approach the building. Greeters will be in place to monitor and will look to determine if you have any visible signs of illness. (If you have allergies that result in coughing or sneezing you will not be able to attend.)

--Greeters will also count the number of people arriving, as we are limited as to the number of people who can attend. Initially we are allowing up to 150 attendees at each Mass. If we reach that number we will have to cease admitting other people.

-- All will enter through the Gathering Hall doors on Adams Place. Outside of the doors you will be instructed to read a posted "self-assessment" to determine if you and accompanying family members may enter and participate in Mass. At this point you must use your own hand sanitizer or it will be provided.

-- ***Before entering, anyone over the age of two is required to put on a mask or facial covering which must stay on throughout Mass and until they leave the church.*** Please note that your children must be able to comply with this requirement for the entire time they are in the church/Gathering Hall. We will not have any space for children to wait if they are uncomfortable during Mass. There will not be an option for standing or sitting in the church foyer or Gathering Hall.

-- ***For tracking purposes***, we will "sign in" all attendees. Please give your name (i.e. Jane Doe, Jane and John Doe, or the Doe Family) with phone number and email where you can be reached during the day. By agreeing to be signed in, you confirm that you read the self-assessment and that you and accompanying family members are able to attend Mass.

--You will then be able to take a bulletin and song sheet. Although there is no congregational singing, you may want the song sheet to follow along.

--Next, please follow the directions of ushers who will direct you to your seat. ***You will not have an option to request a specific seat or area.*** You will be seated in the next available pew that can accommodate you and your family.

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### ***During Mass.***

--We will not have an entrance procession and for safety purposes we will not have congregational singing. For the immediate future we will only have one Eucharistic Minister to serve with Father in distribution of the Holy Eucharist. And, we will only have one lector who will provide announcements and do both readings. There will not be an offertory collection. Baskets will be provided at the front side entrances for your donations as you leave.

--Father will give you instructions as needed throughout the Mass to make sure everyone is aware of what to expect.

-- Before you leave your pew to receive Communion, please be sure to use hand sanitizer. An usher will make it available to you if needed. Then, please follow all directions of the ushers for approaching the Presider/Eucharistic Minister for Communion. All those receiving will come down the center aisle when instructed to do so. Once you have received the host, you will take a few steps to the side, lift your mask to receive the host, replace your mask, and return to your seat as directed by the ushers.

### ***After Mass***

--***Please remain seated*** and gather all materials from your pew.

--All attendees will be directed by the ushers to leave through the side doors.

--As you leave, collection baskets will be available for those who do not contribute in another manner.

--Unless you choose to keep them, you will discard your bulletin and song sheet in the recycling bin.

--Please use hand sanitizer before you leave the church.

--Please do not gather outside, but return to your cars, maintaining social distancing at all times.

### ***Other***

--Please do not bring personal items, ie: prayer books, toys for children, etc. to Mass with you.

--Bathrooms will be available on an emergency basis only. Only one person (or family members) will be allowed in at a time. Please see instructions for cleaning after yourself, posted on the bathroom mirror.

--***Don't forget your mask and hand sanitizer!***

--***And, again, be sure to arrive for Mass 30 minutes before the start of Mass!***

--A reminder: "livestream" Masses are available for those unable to attend. Please go to [www.rcda.org](http://www.rcda.org).

I want to thank all of the volunteers who are ready and able to serve at this time. Their willingness to participate as a Greeter, Lector, Eucharistic Minister, Usher and Cleaner makes our reopening possible. Please thank them and respect and follow any instructions they give you. It is for your safety and to ensure that we meet all required guidelines.

I also want to thank our Reopening Committee: Pete Bukowski, Joe Catalano, Pat Holm, Anne Hurley, Jean Leonard, Catherine Lowenski and Joyce Prichard. Their time, expertise and recommendations have been invaluable.

Let us continue to keep each other in prayer during this difficult time.

In Christ,

*Father Berberian*