

Pastoral Council Meeting Minutes for March 27, 2021

Attendees: Father Steve, Char Snekvik, Jim Lincoln, Mary Schweitzer, Eric Patera, Kevin Owens, Charlotte Worthy, Aurora Horstkamp, Rob Cassleman

No meeting agenda. This is a supplementary meeting for dealing with the issue of reopening the church for in-person celebrations of the mass.

We reviewed recent updates including:

1. Bishop Daly's direction on whether we could open masses to individuals that are fully vaccinated: Bishop Daly said we could not set up a two-tiered system based on whether parishioners are vaccinated or not vaccinated. We need to open masses to all or none.
2. Governor Inslee's declaration of Phase Three status on March 22: The Council recognized that Phase 3 allows churches to accommodate up to 50% of the church's capacity. However, the Council maintains that the decision about whether to open SHC for in-person masses needs to be based on what the current local COVID data show and not simply the option to do it.
3. Current trends in COVID-19 infections in Whitman County: According to the Whitman County COVID-19 data site the period from March 14-27 produced an infection rate of 379/100K. The Governor's Phase 3 guidelines require fewer than 200/100K over a fourteen-day period, in order for large counties to maintain Phase 3 status. Additionally, Statewide, COVID-19 variants are currently being communicated, including the B.1.1.7 (UK variant) and the P.1 variant (first discovered in Brazil). It was noted that these variants have a significantly higher infection rate than the original SARS CoV-2 strain.
4. Father's proposed schedule for phased reopening: Bishop Daly has indicated he will likely rescind the dispensation from attending mass on June 6, the Feast of Corpus Christi, depending on what the situation with COVID-19 is. Therefore, Father Steve has been working on a model for a phased re-opening of SHC, utilizing the current televised morning masses, the current Sunday parking lot mass, adding outdoor masses on the church grounds and, lastly opening SHC for in-person mass. Father feels he could add a second daily mass (Tuesday through Friday-he gets a day off each week on Monday) to be held outdoors on the parish grounds like the format used before inclement weather arrived last autumn. Furthermore, Father expressed the hope we can offer our first indoor in-person mass around the end of April. All masses would still require social distancing and masking to attend. Kevin suggested we conduct a parish survey to get the sense of the best time for offering a second mass. It was decided a survey would be done the week of March 29.
5. Father reported he has begun purchasing portable air filtration machines in anticipation of the later return to indoor masses.
6. Mary Schweitzer suggested we communicate to the parish a list of the ways in which our parish has accommodated for the COVID-19 throughout the last year.
7. A discussion arose surrounding a recent letter from a parishioner who expressed frustration with the slow pace of re-opening the church for Sunday mass. Despite sincere expressions of understanding for the individual and their family the Council feels it is necessary to proceed cautiously in returning to in-person masses and that the decision to open up will depend on a significant improvement in the COVID environment locally.
8. Father Steve concluded with a prayer.
9. Next meeting: April 10, 10 am

Submitted by Rob Cassleman