



June 3, 2020

Dear Parishioner,

How quickly we have turned another page of the 2020 calendar. Perfect vision is 2020- we might ask, what we are seeing this year? Or what may God be asking us to see this year? The letter you are reading will have a different format. The message today is about how our Parish is going about reopening for weekend Masses according to the directives set out by our county Health Department and our Diocese of La Crosse. A significant number of hours from Staff and volunteers have been invested to formulate a plan for our Parish which will create an environment of safety for everyone who comes to pray with us. In order for our Mass attendance to be safe, we need and expect the cooperation of everyone. Now is another time for us to be charitable and generous as we work together in difficult circumstances so we can do our part and pray as Catholics. Our experience of weekend Mass will be quite different, so come prepared to experience these differences.

A little more than a week ago, we provided a few preliminary remarks about returning to Mass. Here, as a reminder, are some of the principal highlights:

1. The faithful should be aware that the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains dispensed until further notice.
39. All those as defined by the health department as more vulnerable (i.e., 65+ years of age, those with compromised immune systems, those with underlying health conditions, those who are especially anxious about being in a large group, etc.) should be encouraged to stay at home.
52. There still will be a risk for anyone who attends a public Mass to contract the coronavirus.
53. There is no pre-determined timeline for how long restrictions will be in place; further developments may allow for the loosening of restrictions or call for the tightening of restrictions.

If you are interested in reading Bishop Callahan's Letter, you may find it here: <https://diolc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Letter-to-all-faithful-May-14-2020.pdf>. And, if you are curious about the policies and restrictions our Parish needs to have in place before we reopen, our Diocesan policy is found here: <https://diolc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Public-Mass-Guidelines.pdf>.

If you choose to come to Mass, know that you will experience the following changes:

1. We strongly encourage you to wear a mask at least while you are in the building.
2. Maintain the recommended social distancing of at least 6 feet at all times, except with people who live in the same household as you.
3. Entering and exiting the church will be through the front doors only.
4. Ushers will greet you, without physical contact, and guide you to a pew – you may have to sit in a place which is not your regular spot.
5. Some pews will be cordoned off to maintain social distancing.
6. Be prepared to observe the ministers at Mass, including our priest, wearing masks or other personal protective equipment and sanitizing their hands often.
7. No confessions will be offered before or after Mass. (Confessions have generally been available Saturday mornings.)
8. No singing – only instrumental music will be played at certain times.
9. Instead of a collection being taken up, offerings may be placed in the basket at the entrance/exit of the church.
10. No Sign of Peace.
11. The Communion line will be directed by an usher to maintain social distancing. If you choose to receive Holy Communion, reception on the hand is strongly encouraged. No Precious Blood will be offered.
12. You will be ushered out the exit (the front doors) after Mass. Socializing is strongly discouraged, even in the parking lot.

Some of the guidelines or restrictions may seem to some to be too restrictive; others may see the same guidelines or restrictions as not going far enough. Remember, no one is obligated to be at Mass – we are dispensed. If you do come, please abide by these policies for the safety of everyone involved.

Regarding our Parish's return to public worship, we need to make preparations and plans. Some of this work needs to be done by volunteers of the Parish. Liz Wilson is coordinating this effort; be in touch with her through email (liz@shspec.org) about how you can help us reopen and sustain the conditions to remain open:

- ❖ *Masks.* We are still receiving donations of masks for liturgical use!
- ❖ *Sanitizers.* The church will need to be sanitized between Mass, and helpers are needed. A schedule and supplies will be provided. This service is likely to be part of our reality into the future so this is more of a commitment for a longer term.
- ❖ *Ushers.* The most visible volunteer ministry once we begin Mass again will be the ushers – and we are always looking for more.

When & how do we reopen, then? It will not be this weekend (June 7), but perhaps the next. It may not be the same Mass schedule as before the shutdown. We will send clear information as soon as those details have been determined. We know that this has taken a while to determine, but please know that we are choosing to be deliberately intentional and systematic so that we can provide the safest experience for those who come to pray with us.

Non-Weekend Liturgies: Weddings; Funerals. As of May 31, we are able to hold weddings or funeral or memorial Masses in our church, provided that we follow similar policies and procedures as on weekend Masses.

In recent days, many of us are unsettled with the new wave of civil unrest following the unfortunate death of George Floyd, just miles from where we live. There are all sorts of positions, opinions and directions to consider in this situation. Sometimes, outrage comes from all sorts of emotions that we just do not know how to manage well individually or as a society. Maybe those emotions and outrage are compounded by living with the reality of social distancing. Readers of this letter, I trust, are believers in God who is present in all aspects of our life. The Holy Spirit was celebrated at Pentecost last weekend. We celebrate the relationship of love in the Trinity this weekend. And, on the weekend we hope to return to Mass, we'll celebrate the Body and Blood of Jesus. Readers of this letter must continue to receive the generosity of God and live as witnesses to His presence in our thoughts, words and actions toward others.

United in prayer,

Rev. Brian J. Jazdzewski – Pastor