

May 20, 2020

Dear St. Peter Parishioners,

We are slowly seeking to reopen. Things are going to be significantly different from what we were doing before the Coronavirus showed up in our world. This, of course, is true not only of the Church, but of everywhere in our lives.

In this letter I want to outline for you some of the changes. First, beginning this week, the Church will now be open (side door only) Monday-Friday, 8am-7pm. Please only sit in designated areas as this will help those who are cleaning and sanitizing the church each day. Also, during this time the restroom will not be accessible.

### **Public Masses**

Masses will resume in a very modified way beginning Tuesday, May 26, 8:30 a.m. Although technically we could have a public Mass on Memorial Day – that day's Mass and prayer should be focused on our veterans, whereas I want the first Mass back in the church to be focused exclusively on the Eucharist. We will continue to livestream those daily Masses and weekend Masses once we are back in the church. You can find that on our Facebook page through our website, [www.stpeterchillicothe.com](http://www.stpeterchillicothe.com). We will continue to livestream, because as you will read in the Bishop's letter, the opening of Masses in no way makes a claim that our services are safe. If you are in the at-risk category or are uncomfortable with the risk, or are showing any possible symptoms, you should stay home and watch the Mass. There is no obligation to attend Mass, at a minimum, through September 16.

I want to emphasize this very much for two reasons: 1) I don't want people needlessly putting themselves at risk and, 2) We are going to be very limited in the number of people who can attend Mass. In order to be compliant with the safe distancing guidelines of the state and the diocese, we can only use every third pew. Within that pew, persons who don't live in the same household must be spaced at least six feet apart. This means that we will be using only 1/3 of our pews and many of these will only be able to accommodate two or three persons.

Because of this, I encourage you to consider coming to a weekday Mass instead of a weekend Mass, if that is possible for you. On the weekend, once the available spots in the pews have been taken, no one else will be allowed in the Mass. We are hoping to have a live-stream in the parish hall for overflow in case it is needed for the first few weekends.

### **What will the Mass look like when we return?**

The ushers will prop the doors open before Mass so people are not continually touching the handles and knobs. Hand sanitizer will be available at all doors and is encouraged to be used. Holy Water will not be in the fonts. Masks will be required to be worn by everyone except for the Mass celebrant during the time of the Mass (and the lector when they are reading). If you forget your mask the ushers will give you one and require you to put it on before coming into the church (except for little children – the diocesan guideline said for those 2 or younger). The

restroom will be locked and will be available only in the case of an emergency by request of an usher.

All hymnals and missalettes have been removed from the churches to remove the risk of contagion. You might consider bringing your phone with an app like “Magnificat” or others that have the readings, or a daily devotional that has the readings. The pews and everything that people touch will be cleaned and sanitized between Masses. You will find a spot to sit in the open pews at least six feet from any other parishioner not of your household. You will need to come into church together so that someone doesn’t base their seat six feet from your family only to find your family extend two or three more people and eliminate their social distance.

The priest will process in and out from the sacristy rather than from the entrance of the church. The Cantor will sing the introit verse as he comes out. There will be no scheduled altar servers or Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. There will be only one lector scheduled at each Mass to remove the case of multiple persons touching the ambo and lectionary. There will be no offertory collection or procession of the gifts. Instead, there will be baskets placed at the entrances of the church for you to make your offering as you leave. The priest will already have the wine and hosts at the altar. There will be no sign of peace and the chalice will not be offered.

At Communion you will be asked to keep social distance of six feet in a single file line. You will remove your mask shortly before Communion and then put it back on after receiving Communion. Receiving in the hand is strongly encouraged by the Bishops during this time. During Communion, the communion antiphon will most likely be sung and/or some instrumental music played. Mass will normally end with either the singing of a verse of a familiar hymn or by the recitation of the St. Michael the Archangel prayer as the priest processes back into the sacristy. Bulletins should still be accessed electronically as they will **not** be regularly printed and distributed. Those receiving their bulletins by mail will still continue to do so. At the end of Mass, you will be asked to exit in a way that you maintain social distance to those around you. Socialization after Mass should not occur within the church and should respect proper social distancing outside of the church. There will be no coffee and donuts, K of C breakfasts, or other receptions for the foreseeable future.

### **Holy Communion for those at Home**

If you are already on our Homebound list, you will be called in the next few weeks to inquire whether you would like to have someone start bringing you Communion again. Due to the nature of healthcare facilities and nursing homes, Communion will still not be allowed to be brought to these places at this time.

### **Live Stream**

Because we will be able to only accommodate about a fraction of our usual capacity and because many will continue to decide to stay at home for a time, we will continue to livestream all Masses both weekend and daily. These can be found on our Facebook page. A replay of the Sunday Mass will be linked on the homepage of the parish website, as well.

### **Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament**

We hope, in the not too distant future, to be able to re-open the Adoration Chapel. This may need to be with modified rules and hours. To help us plan for this, if you are a currently scheduled Adorer, if you could contact Jenny at the office, 740-774-1407 or [secretary@stpeterchillicothe.com](mailto:secretary@stpeterchillicothe.com) and leave a message as to if you intend to restart if we were to reopen in the next month or so. In the meantime, we will be having Adoration on Thursdays in the Church from 9am-7pm. There will be no formal Benediction at the end however.

### **Daily Mass change beginning when we restart**

When we start up, the daily Mass schedule will have one change. The Thursday Mass will be in the morning instead of the evening. This will allow for a smoother transition in July when the new consortium is formed and only two priests are available and we move to only one daily Mass in Chillicothe each day. Weekday Masses will now all be at 8:30am except for Mondays, when it will be at 5:30 p.m. Monday's Mass will be preceded by confessions.

### **Weekend Mass schedule change beginning in July**

The bigger change regards the Saturday evening Mass. When the new consortium is formed in July, there will be only two Masses at each parish on the weekend. St. Mary's will host the Saturday 5:00pm Mass and the Sunday 10:00am Mass. St. Peter will host the Sunday 8:00am Mass and the Sunday 11:30am Mass. This is part of the diocesan wide reduction in Masses that is occurring. For while the Mass attendance in the diocese decreased by something like 30% over the last number of years, the offerings of Masses had increased by 30% or so. As a result, we became very dependent on our retired priests to cover Masses and fill in. This is no longer tenable due to the health threat of the coronavirus. We had already begun plans last fall to address this in the diocese but the virus has sped up the process.

Therefore, every deanery was given a list of the Masses in the deanery and those that were attended at less than 50% of capacity were to be consolidated where possible. October counts for the last number of years have shown both 5:00 Masses in Chillicothe to be at less than 50% capacity. Therefore, the deanery recommendation was that when the consortium is formed the two would be combined into one Mass at one of the churches. It then didn't make sense to have St. Peter's host three Masses and St. Mary's host one Mass on the weekend. Thus, beginning in mid-July with the new consortium, there will no longer be a Saturday evening 5:00 Mass at St. Peter. However, by then it will be the same pastor and same parochial vicar whether you are going to St. Peter or St. Mary. Your envelopes for St. Peter will still get back to St. Peter's when you leave it in the offering box at St. Mary's (and vice versa).

I know this will come as very disappointing news to our 5:00 Mass regulars. However, it's just adjusting to the reality of not only decreased numbers of priests but that Catholics aren't going (when they could ☺ ) to Mass in the numbers they were only a decade ago. We have to be wiser on our distribution of priests and Masses. We should not have priests celebrating in half full churches and, as a whole, the diocese needing to rely on so many elderly priests to fill the

gaps. Of course, the irony of it being at this time is that social distancing measures are going to make most of our churches be filled to “capacity” for a while.

### **Confessions**

Once Masses begin, Confessions will for the time being, still be heard in the parish hall. You will not need a reservation at that point, however you will still need to keep the confession brief and it will be only given standing, while the priest is facing away from you. A Knights of Columbus member or a sister will help make sure the line is at 6ft intervals and will assist you with any questions. Confessions will be heard 5-5:15pm on Mondays and 4:00-4:30pm on Saturdays.

### **Office**

We will continue to *not* to keep regular office hours. If you need to speak with Jenny or Donna, you can still arrange to speak by phone or when necessary, schedule a time to come in and meet personally.

### **Transition**

Some have been asking me about the transition of pastors. It is not likely that we will be able to hold any kind of large parish picnic farewell to me (and one or both parochial vicars – we still have not heard) or hello to Fr. Hayes. Although, there is always a glimmer of hope something will change, at this point the idea of larger public gatherings of a traditional sort is just not likely. So, we may need to find creative ways to say our good-byes and hellos.

### **Final Thoughts**

So... that is where we stand at this point. This is a very fluid thing, so depending on how things unfold both locally with these changes, at the level of the diocese, and as well as within the State of Ohio Health Guidelines, all of this is subject to change. The bottom line is this is one step back towards normalcy but certainly we are not there. Although we will now be able to publicly celebrate the sacraments, it is thought that normal parish life will not return until sometime in 2021. In the meantime, let us keep finding ways to live our Faith to the full during this unique period of time. Keep checking on those who are more at risk. Keep praying for an end to the threat of the coronavirus. God bless you for your constancy and faithfulness during this time!

In Christ,  
Fr. Hahn