

Dear Parishioners,

As you are aware by now, the second phase of our restoration project at Holy Spirit Church has finally begun! And due to your incredible generosity, we have met our fundraising goal! First and foremost, I wish to sincerely thank you for your dedication to this project and for your self-sacrificial generosity. You have made this restoration of God's holy temple possible. Thank you!

As we begin this second phase in earnest, I wanted to write to you about some of the logistics of the use of the Church during this time of restoration. First, as we did a few years ago, all Masses and other prayer services will take place in the social hall of the Church, which has already been converted into a temporary chapel for our use. The sacrament of reconciliation will continue to be offered at the normal times in the classroom of the education center as has been the case since the beginning of the pandemic.

During the restoration work over the next several months, there will be three ways to access the social hall for Mass. First, one can enter through the back-alley doorway, which is also the handicap accessible door for the lower level. Second, one can enter through the side entrance door on the education center, similar to how one might enter to go to confession, and simply walk through the education center, down the stairs, and into the social hall. Third, one can enter the upper Church through the handicap ramp entry door, and then proceed to immediately go down the stairs into the social hall. Please note that the main entry doors will not be accessible during this time of the project. Neither will the new bathroom in the gathering space of the upstairs Church be accessible for parishioners. We will only be able to use the handicap ramp entrance to go into or out from the social hall, not to access any other part of the upstairs Church.

In that regard, while the temptation to peek into the Church to check on the progress of the project will certainly be significant, I am asking parishioners to please stay out of the upstairs Church during the entirety of the project, unless you are carrying out some sort of approved work for the project. This is obviously due to serious safety concerns. There are supplies, scaffolding, and workers constantly moving about, and we need to keep both them and our parishioners safe.

Finally, allow me to offer instructions regarding the use of the downstairs space, specifically during this time of the pandemic. First of all, for each Saturday night and Sunday Mass, we will have prepared the capability of livestreaming the Mass and having it broadcasted on a television in the classrooms in the education center as an overflow option, or for people who are uncomfortable being in the social hall due to the pandemic, but would be comfortable being in one of the classrooms. This would also allow for overflow or others who may be in the classroom to have the opportunity to receive Holy Communion.

Second, wearing of masks will be of special importance when at Mass in the social hall due to the smaller confines of the space. Please remember that the wearing of masks while indoors is not something that we are exempted from due to religious liberty concerns. In this regard, the Church is being asked to observe the same regulations as stores and businesses around us. Masks will continue to be available to those who need one at each of the entrances.

Third, social distancing will also continue to be important, and here I'd like to stretch our understanding of what might be our conception of how we should position ourselves when attending Mass. First, a little historical context.

The use of rows of pews at church is not a Catholic tradition. It actually comes from the Protestant tradition, because during Protestant services, the sermon given by the pastor was typically significantly longer than a homily given by a priest at Mass. So, for the convenience of the people listening to the sermon, pews were installed for people to sit in while listening to the sermon. Indeed, most of the really old Catholic Churches in Europe have never had pews. Catholics would stand for Mass at a place of their choosing in the nave. That may seem strange to us, because we are so conditioned to have "our pew" that we always sit in. But the challenge of the pandemic and the smaller space of the social hall will stretch that idea a bit.

Basically, what I am saying is that while there will be rows of chairs set up for your convenience in the social hall, parishioners do not need to feel bound to only make use of the arrangement already established. In other words, if some parishioners would feel more comfortable moving a few chairs and sitting further away from the congregation in one of the corners of the hall, or, even in the hallway leading to the back door, or even in the kitchen for that matter, that is perfectly fine. If a parishioner wishes to stand off by themselves to observe a greater distance from others, that's fine. We are not confined to just using the chairs the way that they happened to be set up. You are free (within reason of course!) to sit or stand wherever you feel most comfortable. As I had said before, the masses celebrated in the social hall will be briefer so as to not unnecessarily prolong our time together in that space. Sanitation of the social hall after each Mass will continue.

However, despite the freedom to stand or sit where you wish and from a place where you can still participate, please remember a few very important points: first, this freedom should in no way lessen our attentiveness or our reverence during Mass. In other words, we shouldn't use this opportunity to "make ourselves comfortable." It is still the same sacrifice of the Holy Mass taking place. Second, because kneeling for the Eucharistic prayer would be difficult since there are no kneelers, it is perfectly acceptable to stand during the Eucharistic prayer while we are in the social hall. A person is of course free to kneel on the floor if they wish to do so. I do ask that unless you have a medical or other reason for doing so, please do not sit during the Eucharistic prayer. Standing is much more of an "at attention" position than sitting.

Finally, for the distribution of Holy Communion, we will follow the same protocol as upstairs- the deacon and I will distribute Holy Communion to the parishioners on the right side, or Mary statue side of the chapel first, and then we will distribute Holy Communion to those on the left side. You may stand, kneel or be seated after having received Holy Communion.

Lastly, as you enter and leave the social hall chapel, please remember to genuflect before the Tabernacle, to observe proper spacing and not crowd around doorways, and, please remember that for the duration of this project, the social hall chapel *is our Church*. And so, we need to treat it that way by observing the same reverence and quiet that we would in the upstairs Church. Lengthy socializing or unnecessary conversation should take place somewhere else.

Please also remember that we will continue to leave the three Church entrances that I mentioned open for normal hours (as before the project) so that parishioners may come and pray in the social hall chapel during the day if they wish. In a lot of ways, just how much that social hall chapel really feels like a chapel will depend upon us and the way that we carry ourselves while we are in that space.

Thank you, friends, for your consideration of my letter. I am so excited to see the finished product upstairs and be able to worship in a newly renovated and beautified space! Until then, let's do all that we can to make our temporary worship space as peaceful, reverent, and welcoming as possible.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. God bless you!

Fr. Steve Laflamme