

Pastor's Voice – May 26, 2020

After several months in isolation and movement restrictions, we have been given the okay to reopen our churches by both the Federal and state governments and the Diocese of Portland. This happy moment comes with restrictions and conditions and is NOT a quick return to how we celebrated church and community at the start of the year. Please be patient as I unfold our new reality.

I must first remind all parishioners that since March, the Diocese has lifted the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. This means that during this time of church closures, it was not a sin to miss Mass on Sunday. This is still in effect. If you do not attend Mass on Sunday now and until this pandemic is over, it will not be a sin against you. With that in mind and despite my desire to have everyone back in church, I strongly urge everyone that is 65 or older, has a medical condition that would be impacted by COVID 19, or someone who lives with a person who matches that description to stay home on Sunday and share the Mass on one of the many media channels that it is available on.

The first restriction we are facing is that only 50 people can be in the church at any one time. This includes the priest and any ministers, ushers, musicians or lectors that may be needed. This means that in order to be as fair as possible and to allow as many different people as possible to attend Mass, ALL parishioners MUST call the office and tell us what Mass they wish to attend. They must also inform us of how many family members are to be included. If there is room available at that particular Mass, we will record your name and send you tickets for that Mass. If there is no room available, you will be contacted and your name will go on the list for the following week's Mass if you so choose. Since it is not clear at this time how many will want to attend these Masses, it is uncertain how many "rounds" of these groupings of people we will have to go through until we get back to the starting group. But, **DO NOT** expect to be able to attend each week.

The second restriction is the continuing need for social distancing. Even with only 50 people attending we will need to be spread out in the church to minimize the chance of spreading the virus. We have placed tape markers in the pews to direct the seating of the congregation. To keep with social distancing in all directions, every other pew has been left empty. Not all the pews were necessary to seat 50 people so those not needed will be roped off to indicate that they are not to be used. The main reason for this is reduce the amount of cleaning and disinfecting that will need to be done after each Mass. These precautions are to separate non-family members, which means that family members who live together may sit together. This may mean that places in the pews may not be available as marked but it also means that others will be open for use. Please note, seats and benches that are not with the main body of pews will either be removed or indicated that they are not for use.

Expanding on this second restriction, all the doors but one will be locked from the outside so that only one entrance and one exit will be available to enter and exit the churches. This reduces the amount of traffic in the churches and simplifies the cleanup process. The traffic pattern for Communion will also be made more simple, with at most, two lines and two Eucharistic ministers. Markers will be placed on the floor to guide the Communicants to proper social distancing as they approach the altar area. Instructions will be announced before Communion time so that everyone will be ready for the new method.

All of these changes are based on the guidelines established by the Federal and state CDC departments. In addition, we are asking ALL parishioners who attend Mass to wear a cloth face covering or mask of some type. Hand sanitizing stations will be placed in convenient spots in the churches. The Bishop has asked the priests celebrating Masses to not wear a mask during the liturgy except at the distribution of Communion. Bishop Deeley has also stated that people **must receive** Communion in the hand, as this is the most sanitary way available. If contact between Eucharistic minister and Communicant happens, an ablution bowl and hand sanitizer will be in place so the minister may wash and sanitize and then return to distributing the hosts. We are asking that there be no social gatherings in the churches either before or after Masses. I understand that some of these things might

seem to be very hard or even unnecessary, but your safety and the safety of the priest and his staff and volunteers is our most important consideration.

Bishop Deeley has announced that the Diocese will follow the directions of the Governor and start to reopen our churches on June 1, 2020. We plan to have weekday Masses starting on that date with the following schedule:

Tuesday – St. Peters – 8:30am

Thursday – St. Martins of Tours – 8:30am

Friday - – St. Benedicts – 9:00am

For these Masses, all the social distancing, traffic patterns, mask wearing, Communion reception and all the other guidelines will need to be followed. At this time we are not requiring you to call ahead and reserve a space. If the attendance numbers becomes too great that may have to change. We will see as time goes on.

Starting on June 6, 2020 the weekend Mass schedule will be as follows:

Saturday – St. Martin of Tours – 4:00pm

Sunday – St. Benedicts – 8:00am

Sunday – St. Peters – 10:00am

Please note that the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be available at 3:00pm on Saturdays at St. Martins and before the weekday Masses at each church and also by appointment.