

Dear Saint Raphael Parishioners,

9/2/2020

With weather turning from summer to fall, we will hold our last outdoor Mass in the parking lot this Sunday the 6th of September. The following weekend all Masses, Saturday night and Sunday, will be indoors.

Many are concerned about the safety of worshipping in the church. While nothing during a pandemic is risk-free, guidelines of staying 6 feet away from others, avoiding congregational singing, wearing masks, and sanitizing hands are effective. An article from Real Clear Science written and signed by doctors specializing in infectious disease control highlights the following points:

- Catholic churches across the country have been open for up to four months since shelter-in-place orders were lifted. With approximately 17,000 parishes in America typically holding three or more weekend masses - and a greater number of daily masses - for the last 14 or more weeks - over one million public masses have been celebrated following guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus: in sum, follow the three W's - watch your distance, wear your mask, and wash your hands.
- For Catholic churches following these guidelines, no outbreaks of COVID-19 have been linked to church attendance, even though we have examples of asymptomatic, unknowingly infected individuals attending mass and other parish functions. Their attendance could have led to an outbreak if appropriate precautions were not followed, yet in each case, we found **no evidence of viral transmission**.
- To date, the evidence does not suggest that church attendance - following the current guidelines - is any more risky than shopping for groceries. And the spiritual good for believers in coming to church is immeasurably important for their well-being.

In July, Bishop Chad encouraged people who are not at high risk to return to church. Only those who are considered high risk (i.e., those who are immune deficient, elderly, etc.) or living in communities with stricter protocols are dispensed from attending church. If you or a member of your household fall into a high-risk category and would like to receive Holy Communion at home, please notify our office so that we can work on providing the sacraments to you.

With the return to indoor worship, there are some obvious limitations. Not everyone who would fit in the church on Sunday morning when there was no pandemic will fit in the church with social distancing. Please consider finding a church time that, while perhaps less convenient, will allow you to worship and receive the sacraments:

- The Saint Raphael Saturday night Mass has excess capacity if the church hall is used with the TV feed as on Easter or Christmas.
- The Cathedral can accommodate more parishioners at the following Masses
 - Vigil at 4:30 PM.
 - Sunday Morning at 8:00 AM
 - Sunday evening at 5:30 PM (Saint Mark Mass held at the Cathedral).
 - If you attend one of these Masses, and are not giving through We Share, the Cathedral will send your offering to Saint Raphael as long as it is clearly marked by the use of an envelope or the check being made out to Saint Raphael.

For the months to come, we will be operating differently. We are currently exploring how to live stream Mass from Saint Raphael, how to hold Super Saturday online, and how to take advantage of the gift of having Fr Kaspar with us for a little longer and possibly having an additional weekend Mass until he returns to India.

We will continue to try to adapt to best serve the needs of everyone with the limited resources that we have. I have made every effort possible through daily homilies to provide you with spiritual support during this difficult time. I and the staff are working on updating the website to provide more information to each of you. I know there are many more questions than answers, but we are trying our best to provide for your spiritual care.

Please continue to pray for our Nigerian priests who have not been able to provide any ministry to their bush parishes as they continue to patiently wait, 9 months and counting, for travel restrictions to ease so they may return to serve in our diocese.

Peace,
Fr Ross