

Dear St. Mary 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 evident everywhere in our lives.

In this letter I want to outline for you some of the changes.

### **Confessions**

Confessions will continue to be heard in the parish hall. Appointments can still be made by calling Karen, at 740-708-0073 . They are normally held on Sunday mornings, and will continue at that time, even after Masses begin.

### **Public Masses**

Masses will resume in a very modified way beginning Wednesday, May 27, 5:30 p.m. We will continue to livestream those daily Masses and weekend Masses on the facebook page once we are back in the church. You can find that on our Facebook page through the link on our website, [www.stmarywaverly.org](http://www.stmarywaverly.org). It is also linked in every bulletin. 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, or living with someone at risk, you should stay home and watch the Mass. There is no obligation to attend Mass at a minimum through September 16. While we all desire so deeply to return to the Eucharist and our parish family, we must consider the best way to protect others.

I want to emphasize this very much for two reasons: 1) I don't want people needlessly putting themselves or their families at risk 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 one family, or two single people at opposite ends.

Because of this I encourage you to consider coming to a weekday Mass instead of a weekend Mass if that is possible for you. At each Mass, once the available spots in the pews have been taken, no one else will be allowed in the Mass.

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

The ushers will prop the Main doors open before Mass so people are not continually touching the handles and knobs. The side door will be exit only. Hand sanitizer will be available at the door and is required 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/cantor 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. You will be directed to a spot to sit in the marked pews that accommodates your family size and you will remain at least six feet from any other parishioner not of your household. You will need to come in together to be seated 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. We will move people as needed to maintain 6 ft of 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 seated at the front 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 arrive or 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 in the center. There will markers on the floor to help you keep distance. Ushers will dismiss you by row, starting at the back, to get in the line. You will remove your mask shortly before Communion and then put it back on after receiving Communion. Receiving in the hand will be necessary during this time, as you will be a distance from the priest when you receive, and extending your hands will be necessary. During Communion, the communion antiphon will most likely be sung and/or some instrumental music played. Mass will normally end with the recitation of the St. Michael the Archangel prayer or occasionally a verse of a familiar hymn as the priest processes back into the sacristy. Bulletins should still be accessed electronically as they will not be regularly printed and distributed. At the end of Mass ushers will dismiss by row beginning from the back. Socialization after Mass should not occur in the church or directly out front, and should respect proper social distancing anywhere outside of the church. There will be no coffee hour 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.

If for any reason you are not coming to Mass at this time, but would still like Communion brought to you, please contact the office, 740-947-2436 or stmary\_QM@frontier.com We will begin to arrange for Communion to be brought to you. If you have a friend or family member who will still be coming regularly to church during this time and you would like them to bring you Communion, please give us that information. If not, we will gladly assign someone to you.

### **Live Stream**

As we will only be able to accommodate a fraction of our usual capacity, and because many will decide to continue to stay at home for a time, we will continue to livestream all Masses both weekend and daily. These can be found St Peter’s Facebook page.

## **Daily Mass change beginning when we restart on May 27**

When we start up, the daily Mass schedule will be different, as we will be adding a daily Mass for the first few weeks. We will still have our usual Wednesday evening Mass at 5:30pm. The newly added Mass will be on Tuesdays at 6:30pm, beginning June 2nd. This added Mass is moved a bit later to help accommodate those of you just getting off work at 5pm, as it should be easier for you to make it to a 6:30 Mass, and we hope to spread out the attendance across three Masses (instead of just two) so that everyone gets a chance to attend. In Chillicothe at St Peter, the Weekday Masses will now all be at 8:30am except for Mondays, when it will be at 5:30 p.m.

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

There will be no change to the Waverly Sunday Mass at 9:30 am, but since many of you attend St Peter on occasion, in particular on Saturday evenings, you should be aware of the changes there. Last fall the diocese began a diocesan-wide reduction in Masses. 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, but these Masses were not always well attended. 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.

The deanery recommendation was that when the consortium is formed in Chillicothe and Waverly in July, the two Saturday Masses, both with attendance less than 50%, would be combined into one Mass at one of the churches. Thus beginning in mid-July with the new consortium, there will no longer be a Saturday evening 5:00 Mass at St. Peter. There will be a Saturday 5:00 pm Mass at St Mary, Chillicothe.

It's a bit hard to adjust 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 and 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 is at this time of social distancing measures, most of our churches will be filled to "capacity" for awhile. This Mass change is our reminder to continue to pray for and encourage vocations, and to remember the call to evangelize!

## **Office**

We will continue *not* to keep regular office hours. If you need assistance, you can still arrange a time to speak by phone or when necessary, schedule a time to come in and meet personally. Emailing the office is still the best method: stmary\_QM@ frontier.com

## **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 that 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**