

Resumption of Public Worship at St. Columbkille Parish

Thanks for reading this, and for your patience.

As you probably know by now, public Masses will resume in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati on Monday, May 25. But this will not be a return to the normal we used to know. Social distancing and other precautions to curb the spread of the coronavirus will be followed. Catholics continue to be dispensed from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass, so if you are experiencing any symptoms, or have an increased risk, you are encouraged to stay home and join the Church's worship on-line or on TV. Also, in the absence of a Sunday obligation your praiseworthy desire to attend Mass can be satisfied at weekday liturgies.

Those who do attend in person are encouraged to wear a mask. The priest celebrating is discouraged from wearing a mask, presumably for liturgical reasons, so don't think he has no regard for your health or his own!

Need for Precautions

The coronavirus is transmitted by touching a surface with the virus and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. It is also transmitted through the air by aerosol, tiny moisture droplets that can stay suspended in the air for various periods of time depending on the size of the droplets. Someone with the virus gives it off simply by breathing, but not very much. More is put into the air by talking, then singing, then talking or singing loudly, by shouting, by coughing, and the most virus is projected by sneezing, at surprisingly high velocities!

Infection requires exposure to a threshold amount of viral particles, so what matters is the concentration you are exposed to and the duration of time of exposure.

Many people + a small space + a long duration = high risk.

Few people + a large space + a short duration = low risk.

The aim of these restrictions is to lower the risk level by limiting the number of people in our church space, their proximity to each other, and the time duration.

Original Precautions Will Continue

The precautions used on the last weekend before the shutdown will continue.

- no water in the fonts
- bread and wine will not be brought forward from the back
- no physical contact at the Our Father or Sign of Peace
- no Holy Communion from the cup, except for the priest who is required
- Holy Communion on the tongue is strongly discouraged. This sign of reverence is normally laudable, but so is concern for the health of others in our particular circumstances, and surely pleasing to God.

Additional Precautions

Arrival

Using the six-foot distance rule, we estimate the seating capacity of St. Columbkille to be about 90 persons, and of Holy Name to be about 40.

The average weekend attendance at Holy Name before the shutdown was just over forty, so if people just spread themselves out, we should be fine.

The average weekend attendance at St. Columbkille ranged from 155 at the least attended Mass to 220 at the highest. This means that at St. Columbkille we will have to monitor the number of people in church. We ask everyone to enter the front doors facing Mulberry Street so that a count can be taken. Those who must use the handicap entrance may still do so. After 90 people have entered, additional arrivals will be directed to the parish center where a large space will be set up for viewing the Mass in church on TV. Communion will be brought to you and a basket will be available for your Sunday offering.

Seating

To facilitate six-foot distancing, we ask you to use alternate pews. The pews will be color coded with pieces of tape fastened at six-foot intervals. Please sit in different colored pews at different Masses.

Sat. 4:00 pm use the blue pews

Sat. 6:15 pm festival seating!

Sun. 8:15 am use the yellow pews

11:00 am use the blue pews

Roving disciplinarians will not be enforcing this, so let common sense and courtesy be your guide. It is better to position yourself at six feet than to rigidly follow the rule. Individuals from the same household may sit closer together.

Music

To reduce transmission by touch, all materials are to be removed from the pews. This means the Heritage Missal that provides the Scripture readings and the hymns.

The Scriptures for that Sunday will be available on our parish website. Those with smart phone or electronic devices can follow along. Because there are copyright issues with duplicating music, even online, and to reduce transmission by aerosol, we will not be able to have the full range of singing that we normally have. Depending on availability we will have an organist and a few singers in the choir loft. The congregation is welcome to sing along as they are able.

Collection

A basket is not to be passed through the congregation, so we will have two baskets up front to receive your Sunday offering. (And thank you for your support! Donations have been better than we expected, but they are down from pre-shutdown levels)

To avoid “in-your-face” cross traffic, consider passing by the basket on your way out at the end of Mass. A basket will also be available in the Parish Center.

At Holy Name, the ushers use long-handled collection baskets, so they will take up the collection in the usual way.

Communion

To maintain social distancing, please come forward to communion in a single file line. There will be marks on the floor to help you visualize six feet. The Deacon or a Eucharistic Minister will take communion to any who have gone to the parish center.

Restroom

Restrooms in use on the weekends will be cleaned after every Mass. Nonetheless, since a restroom is a small confined space it is recommended that you wait a few minutes after the previous user before entering. Best to use the restroom at church for emergencies only.

Departure

We all like to catch up with friends and make new friends after Mass but remember that many people talking loudly in a confined indoor space is high risk. Hopefully the weather will be nice, and we can visit outdoors, six feet apart!

Schedule

Weekend Masses

Since we don't know ahead of time what attendance will be like, we will resume our usual weekend Mass schedule starting May 30 / 31.

Saturday 4:00 pm at St Columbkille 6:15 pm at Holy Name

Sunday 8:15 am and 11:00 am at St. Columbkille

We may discontinue Masses that are significantly underattended. The Archdiocese guidelines express concern about exposing vulnerable priests to multiple gatherings. While I still think of myself as young and indestructible, I'm told that being over sixty and having a history of asthma puts me in a higher risk group. Ach bin!

But my otherwise good health reassures me and I'm happy to undertake our normal Mass schedule if it is necessary to accommodate those who wish to attend. Let us pray for one another.

Weekday Masses

We will return to the old schedule:

Mon., Thurs., and Fri. at 9:00 am, St. Columbkille

Wed. at 7:00 pm, St. Columbkille

Communion Service

We will return to the old schedule:

Tuesday at 9:00 am, St. Columbkille

Confessions

Because confessions are not to be heard in small confined space, I will use the server's sacristy. It is the back room on the left as you face the altar. I will be behind a wood partition. The penitent will have a chair to sit on.

First Saturday 3:00 pm - 3:45 pm, St. Columbkille.

Every Wednesday following the 7:00 pm, St. Columbkille Mass.

On Wednesday, we will have exposition of the Blessed Sacrament during confession time, concluding with benediction.

Eucharistic Exposition

We will return to the old schedule:

Immediately following the 7:00 PM Wednesday Mass, St. Columbkille, we will have exposition of the Blessed Sacrament during confession time, concluding with benediction.

Every Friday from 9:30 am – 3:00 pm, St. Columbkille.

Thank You!

The parish staff and I have worked out these measures trying for prudent safeguards without getting overly directive. Common sense, courtesy, and God's grace will get us through this difficulty. May the sacrifices we make today bear fruit in the future.