

Dear Parishioners,

We are all aware of Governor Walz's latest Executive Order 20-99, which goes into effect tonight, in which the Governor has "dialed back" certain activities for a four-week period in an attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19.

I am writing to let you know that this new executive order *does not* impact religious services and other faith-based/sacramental activities taking place at our churches. In other words, the order does not add any new limitations on gathering for worship services, faith formation programs, bible studies, etc., provided that they are of a faith-based nature. Wedding and funeral *services* can take place. It is wedding and funeral *receptions* that cannot take place during this four-week period. The celebration of the sacraments such as the sacrament of reconciliation, baptisms, etc., will continue to take place just as they have in previous months up until now.

Here is the pertinent section of the Executive Order:

- ix. **Weddings, funerals, and services.** Places of worship, funeral homes, and other venues that offer gathering space for wedding ceremonies, funeral services, or other planned services such as worship, rituals, prayer meetings, or scripture studies are strongly encouraged to offer virtual alternatives to the maximum extent possible. Places of worship, funeral homes, and other venues that offer gathering space for wedding services, funeral services, or other planned services such as worship, rituals, prayer meetings, or scripture studies, may host such wedding ceremonies, funeral services, or other services, provided that they adhere to the following requirements:
1. In all settings, ensure a minimum of 6 feet of physical distancing between households.
  2. In indoor settings, occupancy must not exceed 50 percent of the normal occupant capacity as determined by the fire marshal, with a maximum of 250 people in a single self-contained space.

As you can see, in our parishes, we are well under the maximum allowed occupancy currently permitted at any given Mass, since most individual weekend Masses in either Two Harbors or Silver Bay do not exceed more than 75 people.

Please also remember that our parish maintenance staff, with the help of volunteers on the weekends, disinfects and sanitizes the church after each Mass. Provided that people continue to observe the diocesan protocols, principally by wearing masks while in Church and observing distancing, I have every reason to believe that we will continue to demonstrate, as I mentioned in last week's email, that it is quite possible to gather for worship in a way that is prudent and safe.

For those who may feel uncomfortable attending Mass during this time of a surge in COVID-19 positive tests, please remember that we continue to offer a live-stream of the Sunday Mass each Sunday morning at 8:30am from St. Mary's in Silver Bay. You can access the live-stream on your parish website.

I know that these are difficult and stressful times. Please know that the parish staff and I are here to support you in any way that we are able, and that you, dear parishioners, are in my continuous prayers. Please contact me with any questions or concerns that you may have. God bless you and have a blessed and healthy Thanksgiving Holiday!

Fr. Steve Laflamme