

May 15, 2020



Dear Parishioners:

I write today with the beginnings of good news. After several video conferences with the Bishop and the other Pastors, I am now able to announce that we are moving toward a limited reopening at Holy Trinity. But, before we get into that, please be aware of a few very important points:

- The obligation to attend Mass will remain suspended as long as this health crisis continues. This could mean at least until the end of 2020 with the probable need for continued social distancing until then. **Therefore, no sin is committed if, for any reason, you do not attend Mass during this time.** For those who remain at home, video Masses will continue to be posted on our website in addition to the TV Masses that are available via cable.
- If you are not feeling well in any way, please stay home.
- If you are in an "at risk" category (60+, or have an underlying serious health condition such as high blood pressure, diabetes, immunological deficiency, or a respiratory issue), I urge you to continue to remain home.
- If you have regular contact with someone who is in a "at risk" category, I urge you to continue to remain home.
- Please keep in mind that the mandates and procedures are not just about our own health as individuals. We also have a serious moral obligation toward the health and safety of all those with whom we come into contact who could be infected by any one of us if we happen to be carriers. It is important to keep in mind that someone can spread coronavirus and not himself have symptoms.
- Under the coming scenario, daily Masses remain cancelled and the parish office remains closed. All activities also remain cancelled. Confessions will be heard by appointment only. I will continue to check phone messages and email regularly. I will also continue to offer Mass privately during the week for those Mass intentions that have already been booked. At present, I am not able to accept new Mass intentions due to the Masses that have already been booked and the reduced Mass schedule.
- Overall, the Diocese foresees a slow reopening in limited stages until such a time that we can resume normal practices while following all relevant mandates and health-related procedures. In other words, this is going to take time. Please remain patient with everything I/we must follow. Please remain hopeful and prayerful that we will return to normalcy before too much longer.
- Anything mentioned or planned below could change due to changes in Federal, State, Local, and Diocesan mandates. At present, it is still unclear what mandates will require as of May 20th.
- Please tell others from our parish about this letter which will be posted on our website. Our email database is unfortunately out-of-date and this important information will not reach all of our people without your help. Please just tell them to go to our website to view this letter directly. There is too much information for word-of-mouth. Thank you!

## Initial Stage: Plans and Procedures

(this assumes that there will be no new restrictions implemented on May 20th.)

- It is clear that social distancing will be required for the foreseeable future. Under the present guidelines, this means that there must be a 6 foot clear radius in all directions around every individual present. While current state regulations allow up to 50 people to assemble for religious reasons while keeping social distancing, the number allowed at Holy Trinity will be lower due to our smaller worship space. It is possible that the State will change this number or implement an allowed certain percentage of total occupancy strategy. Again, social distancing must be observed and our number will necessarily be lower than whatever maximum the law will allow.
- Due to social distancing, it is likely that you will not be able to sit in your usual seat. Please be flexible and accommodating with the seating plan and any directions that you may receive to sit in a different place due to social distancing.
- Masks / facial coverings will be required for everyone present. No exceptions. Plan on bringing your own, if you decide to attend. (As the only person who will be on the altar, I will need a mask only at Communion time.)
- Gloves will be recommended, but not required.
- Alcohol gel must be used by every person present upon entering the building and again upon exiting. The Diocese is planning on providing this, but as you are aware, there is a shortage. Please also bring your own gel or sterilizing wipes to be on the safe side.
- There will be a new, but temporary Mass schedule in place which will, over time, return to the normal schedule. The new schedule will be very limited at this time as we work out the kinks and procedures. Depending on how it goes, we will certainly consider expanding the schedule. Details on that further down.
- Physical contact with others cannot be allowed at Mass as we experienced before the shutdown.
- There will need to be proper social distancing for the Communion line. For the time being, the lay ministers (readers & Eucharistic Ministers) will not be activated. These duties will be handled by myself alone.
- You will need to remove your face mask to receive Communion (obviously) and Communion will be under the form of the Sacred Host only.
- If you receive Communion in the hand and are wearing gloves, I must confiscate those gloves at the end of Mass because they have come into contact with the Eucharist. Options would be to remove your gloves before receiving or to receive on the tongue. I will, of course, follow proper sterilization procedures for myself.
- Church Law does not give us the authority to require you to receive Communion in the hand instead of receiving on the tongue. Please make your own decision in this matter taking into account all health-related factors.
- You also have the option to attend Mass without necessarily receiving Holy Communion.
- Since they cannot be properly sterilized, the hymnals will be removed from the church for the time being. This will also impact those who usually read along with the readings. You are

also asked **not** to bring your own worship materials (hymnal, missal, prayer book, printouts, etc.) with you since they also cannot be sanitized.

- Collections will now be taken via a drop box upon entry to the building. The basket will not be passed among the congregation. Please come prepared for this. If you are now interested in converting to credit card giving, please leave a message for the office. You can also continue to mail in your donations.
- Due to social distancing there will not be a procession with the gifts at the offertory.
- **Please read the following section very carefully as it contains the greatest changes that we need to implement:**
  - Due to social distancing and occupancy limits, there must now be a reservation system implemented for attending Mass. This system will be on line. Details to follow as it is still in development by the Diocese. I know an online system won't be convenient for everyone, but it is the only way to co-ordinate everything in a reasonable way. Each week, once we get started and going forward until we return to normal, will require a new set of reservations.
  - Reservations and attendance will be limited to whatever our maximum capacity works out to be. Again, this will be less than the 50 currently allowed by the State due to social distancing requirements. Each individual in a family counts toward that number. (In other words, a family of four takes up four available slots, not one.)
  - Reservations will be available only for registered parishioners.
  - Now the part which no one, including me is happy about... much like at an expensive restaurant, **if your name is not on the reservation list for a particular Mass, you cannot be admitted to the building.**
  - Volunteers, from among those attending, will be needed to help with seating, entry checking/cut off, and to ensure social distancing.
  - Needless to say, there will be no coffee hour after Mass and you will not be allowed to congregate in the building before or after Mass. My strong advice is that you arrive slightly early and leave after Mass immediately. I know we all want to catch up with one another and visit. But, that isn't wise or possible under the current social distancing requirements. Additionally, the building cannot be cleaned/sterilized until everyone has left.
  - *Holy Trinity will be taking all appropriate precautions in light of the CDC and Gov. Lamont's recommendations regarding public gatherings in light of the possible transmission of the coronavirus. However, despite these precautions, it is possible that transmission of the virus is still possible due to the public nature of the service and the unknowns with how the virus may be transmitted. By signing up for a Mass reservation, you recognize the obligation to (i) wear a mask or facial covering when required; (ii) adhere to all required directions regarding social distance spacing when participating in the service and (iii) you will not attend any service if you are sick, experiencing any symptoms consistent with the coronavirus, or are otherwise required to be quarantined. You also acknowledge and understand that you are assuming a risk of transmission and you release Holy Trinity Parish and any clergy involved in the service from any responsibility should you contract the virus in the future.*

- Last (at least for now), but not least... when does all this go into effect? **Assuming no changes in current mandates, Bishop will allow us to begin to reopen on Sunday, June 14th. This will be with one Mass at 10:00am.** Fittingly, this is also the feast of Corpus Christi. The reservation system will open the Monday before. Details to follow.
- One Mass at 10:00am on Sunday will be the schedule going forward for the immediate future. (Again, starting on June 14th.) The Sunday Mass will be offered for the parishioners as required by Canon Law and I will continue to offer other Masses that have already been requested, privately.

I know this is a lot to digest and I'm sure that many will not be happy with every requirement. I am not happy with every aspect either, but this is a step forward. More importantly, these things are what we must do at this time to comply with all relevant laws and mandates to keep our neighbors and fellow parishioners safe. I am confident that I can count on your co-operation and understanding.

Please remember that this is just an initial phase of an incremental process. We will be able to expand and eventually return closer to the normal schedule as time goes on. Once we get the "all clear" to resume the normal, full schedule from the relevant authorities, we will do so.

As always, please continue to pray for an end to this pandemic and for the health and safety of all.

God bless you,

Fr. Gemza