

CHURCH OF ST. PATRICK

53 ST. PATRICK'S PLACE STATEN ISLAND, NY 10306

June 14, 2020

Dear Parishioner,

Sunday is the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ, the day that we remember the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist at Mass and in the Tabernacle. All those who believe that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist consider it important to celebrate Mass and receive communion on Sunday. Eastern Catholics and Orthodox, Episcopalians, and Lutherans believe in the real presence and therefore celebrate Mass and receive communion more than other Christian groups. Catholics, especially feel that we have an obligation to celebrate Mass every Sunday and receive communion.

It has been especially hard for us during this pandemic to be deprived of Mass and communion on Sundays. Of course the obligation to attend Mass has been removed (and will still be removed even when we open up) as long as the pandemic continues. But we are Catholics and we miss the close connection we have with Jesus as we receive Him at Mass. Spiritual communion is good for us as we watch Mass on Facebook and ask Jesus to come into our hearts and fill our lives with His presence, but it will never give us the intense, intimate union we have with Him in the Eucharist.

We are a sacramental people. We don't just live in our minds. We live in a world where there are signs and symbols, rituals and ceremonies, where a community gathers to express what is in our minds and hearts and to receive the gifts that God gives us in this community, especially the gift of His Son. We have longed not just to receive the Body of Christ but to be once again the Body of Christ.

Therefore the news that we received this week that we will be returning to Church in Phase 2 and 3 of our recovery, and that those phases will likely take place at the beginning of July, is welcome indeed. Phase 2 and 3 will happen together and will include weekday mass, baptisms, funerals and weddings (with the church at 25% capacity, or about 60 to 65 people). All will have to wear masks and keep a safe distance from others (unless family members) in the congregation.

Sunday Masses at 25% capacity will start when Phase 4 is announced, probably late in July or in August. This will present a problem because we will only be able to accommodate 420 out of the 1,000 that usually come to Mass during the summer. We don't expect that everyone will feel safe coming to Mass so there may be less than 1,000 that make the attempt, but some may be left outside when 25% (the state authorized maximum) is reached. We will close the doors at that time and ask parishioners to wait in their cars and watch the Mass on Facebook. All the Masses will be live streamed. Then when we get to the communion part of the Mass we will have the 60 people in the church come up the center aisle to receive and go down the side aisle and leave the church immediately by the side doors. Then the people in the cars will be ushered into the church to come up the middle aisle to receive and leave by the side aisles and side doors. That is the best we can do under the safety restrictions. No person will be allowed to receive on the tongue, only in the hand for sanitary reasons.

We realize that some older people and those with medical conditions that might put them at risk might be afraid to come to Mass (they are not obliged) but would like to receive communion. We invite you to purchase a pyx and designate you a temporary Eucharistic minister during the pandemic to bring communion to your sick relative or friend. You bring communion immediately to the person after attending

Mass, make the sign of the cross, say the Our Father, and then “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to His Supper. “They say: “Lord I am not worthy ...” and you hold up the host and say “The Body of Christ,” and then they receive. We want the people to be able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist so we try to make it as easy as possible for all our parishioners in the Church, outside the Church, and at home to receive the close, intimate, intense contact with Jesus that comes in the reception of His Eucharist.

There are children who would have received their First Communions on April 25 and May 2, but because of the pandemic were not able to do so. Once we announce Phase 2 and 3 opening we will allow the families to make appointments to celebrate the First Communion of their children at the 9:00am weekday Mass – only one child at a time with 30 guests allowed. We will also have a large celebration for the 2nd, by then 3rd grade, classes when we are fully open, probably in the spring of 2021. Families are allowed to choose one or both of these Masses.

There are at least 17 families that have been waiting to baptize their children for the last three months. We assured them that God was watching over their children whether they were baptized or not. All children are His children. But they want their children to receive all the grace and love and divine life that comes to them in Baptism, and they are anxious for them to receive the sacrament. As soon as we know that we are moving into Phase 2 and 3 we will take reservations for Baptisms at the weekday 9:00am Masses. As with First Communions 30 guests will be allowed and masks and gloves and social distancing will be in order.

A number of people have died during the pandemic and have been buried without wakes or funerals. At Phase 2 and 3 we will be scheduling funerals and Memorial Masses for those people, allowing the church to be at 25% capacity (60 people) with masks and social distancing. If you think that more than 60 would be attending it might be better to postpone the service until a later phase of the reopening.

We are happy that we are near reopening and that baptisms, and first communions, and funerals, and even small weddings can be permitted. But we must remember that we are still in a pandemic, even though our social distancing measures have slowed down the spread of the virus. Even if we are not worried for ourselves we should continue these safety measures for the vulnerable people among us. We, as a parish, as throughout the Archdiocese, will insist on the wearing of masks and gloves at all church services, and will insist on social distancing within church, as well as on strict adherence to maximum numbers allowed at any of St. Patrick’s celebrations. We want to be open, but we want to be safe.

On this Feast of Corpus Christi we are happy that we will soon be receiving the Body of Christ again, and that by receiving Him we may become the Body of Christ, treating all of our brothers and sisters, all of our friends and enemies with the reverence and love we give Him.

God bless you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeffrey B. Conway". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name of the signatory.

Jeff Conway, Pastor