



St. Mary Catholic Church

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Dear St. Mary Parishioner:

I trust that this letter finds you in good health. Be assured that I have been praying for our entire parish family every day since the start of this terrible pandemic. Accompanying this letter you will see Bishop McClory's letter, dated May 21, that states the dispensation previously granted to all Catholics from their obligation to attend Mass will be lifted effective June 11. Simply put, we are going to be coming back to church, all of us, and for that we give thanks and praise to Almighty God.

I have met with the liturgy committee, and we discussed our options and have come up with a plan that will be implemented immediately to assist the parishioners in returning to St. Mary's. Starting in June, parishioners will no longer need to RSVP for mass at St. Mary's. The seating restrictions in the church will also be lifted and parishioners will be able to sit where they please. We will continue to keep select seating reserved for those who wish to maintain the 3 feet social distancing recommendations from the CDC. Entry and exit to and from the building will no longer be restricted and sanitizing stations will be placed at each entrance. You are asked to sanitize your hands upon entry of the building. The holy water stoups will remain empty for the time being, but the main font will be filled and blessed and the faithful will be able to bring their own personal containers to collect holy water for their own private use.

Effective June 11th, the wearing of masks will no longer be required at our liturgies. For those who have been fully vaccinated, the wearing of masks will be optional. For those who have not been fully vaccinated, you are strongly encouraged to continue wearing your mask, this also includes our clergy, and liturgical ministers. Whether you opt to wear a mask or not, it is my wish that everyone respects each other's decision in choosing their course of action. There should be no discord or rancor between us on this matter and I hope that we will be respectful of each other. Physical interaction during the Lord's Prayer (hand holding) and exchange of the sign of peace will not be reinstated at this time. Physical interactions between members of the same household will not be restricted.

Liturgical ministers will return to their duties and responsibilities on June 11th. We already have had our altar servers and lectors performing their duties and we are grateful for their service during the pandemic. Eucharistic ministers, ushers, and our choir and cantors will also start to return to their ministries. Three altar servers will be assigned to the weekend liturgies and four eucharistic ministers will be assigned to the weekend liturgies for the time being. The Blessed Sacrament will be distributed but consumption of the Precious Blood is still restricted for the time being. Three Eucharistic ministers will assist me in distributing Holy Communion and the 4th will deliver communion to the choir members and those seated in the building who have difficulty standing in line or walking long distances. Reception of Holy Communion will be as follows:

- Those seated on the side pews will process up the side aisle, receive communion and return to their pew via the same side aisle.
- Those seated in the middle, large pews will process up the center aisle, receive communion, and return to their pew via the side aisle on the same side as their seat. So if you are seated on the “Mary” side (left side facing the sanctuary) of the middle pews, you’ll return to your pew via the side aisle on the “Mary” side. Under no circumstances should you return via the center aisle. This would disrupt our social distancing guidelines.
- When in line, all should maintain 3 feet of distance between each other to ensure proper social distancing precautions.

Ushers will make sure that the lines for communion are implemented correctly and the faithful should remain in their pew until the usher gives you direction to get in line for communion. The presentation of the gifts will also come back, so ushers will again select members of the congregation to bring up the gifts during the offertory. Ushers will also resume monetary collections during the offertory.

Mass schedules will also start to return to normal. On the weekend of June 12th and 13th, 11:30AM Sunday mass will be reinstated, to accompany the 4:30PM Saturday mass, and 9:30AM Sunday mass. If everything continues to proceed without any issues and the entire parishioner family continues to return to weekend liturgies, the 7:30AM Sunday Mass will be reinstated on the weekend of July 10th and 11th. Confessions will remain the same time on Saturday, though the sacrament will be administered in the regular confessional, instead of the “cry room” in the back of the church. Face to face confession or screened confession will continue to be an option for all who seek the sacrament.

I look forward to everyone’s return to our liturgies. It has been a long time and an incredibly challenging time given the havoc that the pandemic has caused. I have missed having the chance to talk with you all after mass and I hope that I can resume getting to know you all as your pastor and that our parish family will enter this new chapter with a renewed sense of hope. Placing our trust in our Lord Jesus Christ, we give thanks to Almighty God and ask our blessed Mother Mary to continue to intercede on our behalf.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Reverend Keith M. Virus
Pastor