

5/2/2020

Dear Parishioners and friends,

This is an official announcement on behalf of the Bishop of the Diocese of Austin. On Thursday last Bishop Joe Vasquez issued a decree authorizing the parishes of the Diocese to begin to offer Masses and Sacraments with the people of the parish present. The celebration of public Masses will resume under very restricted conditions beginning on Tuesday, May 5. The Bishop has also given a dispensation from attending Mass to those over 65, those who have underlying health conditions or those who feel unsafe attending, and to those who live with persons in these circumstances. The arrangements we are about to announce are temporary.

A reminder that we are in a time of pandemic. We do not have a vaccine. Our only method of keeping safe is social distancing. Many people have expressed alarm saying that we are opening too soon. Seeing the Church is open is not an announcement that the danger has passed. On April 23rd, eleven days ago we hit the 50,000 total number of deaths in the United States. Eleven days later, today that number is hitting 66,000 deaths. This is not the flu. This is a deadly virus. Projections expect us to hit over 100,000 deaths by August. The schedule I am about to announce is temporary. This will be subject to revision very quickly. Consider that many churches are going to open up now. We will watch and see what happens. If the virus begins to spread rapidly in the Churches we will close immediately. If things improve, we will gradually open up some more.

We will offer public daily Mass at St. Catherine's starting this Tuesday at 12.00pm. We require everyone who attends to continue with social distancing. We also require everyone present to wear a mask. If you don't wear a mask, we will ask you to leave the church immediately. Daily Mass will be celebrated Monday to Friday at 12.00pm. We will continue with live streaming. We have changed our schedule for the weekend. We will celebrate public Mass at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. We will also celebrate public Mass on Sunday at 9:30 a.m. and at 1:15 p.m. The 9:30 a.m. Mass will be live streamed. The priests will hear confessions on Saturday starting around 3:00 p.m. until 4:30 p.m. in the Choir Room.

Managing Mass at the weekend Saturday and Sunday will be more complicated. Under the guidelines we can offer a maximum 25% capacity in the Church. People entering the Church will be required to wear a mask. If you do not have a mask, we will turn you away. We will exercise social distancing and public safety precautions. Given the restrictions we estimate we will be able to seat 70 people in the Church. We will also utilize Johnson Hall in a similar way with Mass on-screen and Communion brought from the Church to the Hall. This will add seating for about 50 more persons. Parish collections will be taken under the form of you dropping your envelopes in a basket on the Offertory table.

Entry and exit from the church will be strictly regulated to comply with government and diocesan rules. Once we have reached capacity, the Church and Hall will be closed. Those arriving too late will be turned away with the assurance of the Bishop's dispensation from attendance. No standing will be allowed. There will be no gathering in the Narthex before or after Mass. Once Mass is over, we invite you to go to your car and depart immediately. Parts of the church and parish buildings that are not in active use will remain closed at all times. People will not be allowed to pray in the Day Chapel. There will be no rosary before daily Mass. The Adoration Chapel will be closed. The Parish Offices will not be open to the public. All communications with the office will be by email and phone.

We have not made a decision yet but we anticipate that Baptisms and First Communions will be celebrated in June. Weddings and Funerals will be celebrated with all the above restrictions and regulations. You will find this information printed on the digital Bulletin and on the Parish Web site.

Right now, we are going to see how things go. If we are found to be safe, we will gradually open up more. If we enter into danger we will close immediately.

On behalf of the priests and staff of the parish we wish you best wishes. Be healthy and safe.

With love, Fr. Pat