



PREPARING TO RE-OPEN

These past days have been filled with many tasks as the Parish Staff has prepared for reopening Sacred Heart of Jesus Church with many directives and numerous cautions, reopening has been quite a project. A word of thanks to all who have helped in this process and of course for all of our prayers and kindness!

Certainly, these are strange days and our return to Holy Mass will have new procedures for entering the church building, where we sit, how we receive Holy Communion and exiting the Church. A reminder that the dispensation from the Sunday and Holy Day obligations to attend Holy Mass remains in effect in the Diocese of Harrisburg until further notice. A dispensation from the precept to receive Holy communion during the Easter Season has been granted by Bishop Gainer. To this end, no one is obligated to attend Holy Mass. Anyone who is sick should not attend Holy Mass, out of concern for the health of all.

Below are a few notes for those preparing for Holy Mass and for those who would like to know how we are implementing all these changes. There will also be a full document on the 'Regathering as a Parish' on our website. Obviously, it's a process to meet all the requirements.

First, given the demands of social distancing, please be aware that 2 out of every 3 pews have been closed off – for many this will mean that all will need to be adaptable about where they sit within the Church. Ushers will seat people. This will require flexibility from all of us. You may be asked to sit in a different part of the Church than you prefer. Your understanding and willingness to be seated by an usher will allow for the most people to be able to attend Holy Mass this weekend. Once we reach our capacity either by total number (40-60 people, depending upon if they come in singles, couples or families) or a lack of space as determined by the constraints of social distancing, we will close the Church for safety.

Second, the wearing of a facemask is required for all throughout their entire time in Church – only removed for a moment for the reception of Holy communion. A facemask is worn properly when it covers the nose and mouth at the same time. Certainly, for many a facemask is uncomfortable (more difficult for those who wear glasses) and a prolonged wearing of a facemask is not easy. With the many cautions in place, each person must continuously wear a facemask (exemption for children under 3). And, all will need to bring their own face mask. This could mean that you are continuously wearing a facemask for an hour (or more...from time of arrival at Church and through the Holy Mass). **NO ONE WILL BE ADMITTED TO MASS UNLESS A MASK IS WORN.**

Third, Holy Communion will be distributed to the faithful after Holy Mass. Ushers will guide parishioners in forming a properly distanced line in the center aisle of the Church sanctuary facing the front doors where Father will distribute Holy Communion. The procedure for reception of Holy Communion has been modified, to account for a facemask. All will wear their facemask while in line for Holy Communion. When a person reaches the first pew, next in line to receive, then the facemask will be pulled down or placed in a pocket. It is recommended that Holy communion would be received in the hand, as a practical precaution, however it is not mandated. The reception and consumption of the Most Holy Eucharist will occur at the same place. (I know that this is not a universal practice, but given all the new parts to the Holy Communion process, it seems safest to immediately consume Holy Communion). Then, after receiving and consuming Holy Communion, a person will step away from the priest and place their mask back on their face properly and immediately exit the church so please bring your belongings with you when you get in line. Yes, this new procedure is precise – the many cautions and concerns demand a detailed method for the reception of Holy Communion.

Finally, all are reminded that this is a new experience for each of us in a time of many cautions. No one is required to attend Holy Mass this weekend or this week – Bishop Gainer has continued the dispensations from Sunday and Holy Days of Obligations, until further notice. Also, given the serious warnings for persons in ‘higher-risk categories’ the decision to attend Holy Mass should consider many factors for each family.

As I reflect on how to apply these cautions and concerns it seems to me that similar rule to Winter Weather Emergencies could apply. When there is a blizzard or significant Winter Storm (ice, snow, etc.) we each make prudential judgements about leaving the house, attending events, or even when and where to travel – we think about our physical health and conditions engage our practice of the faith. It may be the best course of action for some to choose to attend Holy Mass on a weekday in lieu of the weekend or even wait a bit longer, as we begin this ‘Yellow Phase’ of the COVID-19 crisis.