

SAINT MARY'S CHURCH CROWN POINT, INDIANA

May 2020

Dear Friends,

The coronavirus pandemic virus surrounds us – and the suffering it is causing so many people – including our own parishioners – is beyond words. Let's continue praying that God will bless our efforts to defeat this virus.

One of the sad – but necessary – consequences of this pandemic: losing the opportunity to gather in our church building for Mass. Two months ago, the Bishops of Indiana issued a dispensation from our obligation to attend Sunday Mass – and now they have extended that dispensation until August 15, 2020. **This is especially relevant to those among us who are at high risk because of age or underlying health issues: YOU ARE URGED TO STAY AT HOME.**

I know that some of us are aching to gather again for Eucharist. We have been working to develop a plan to gradually resume gathering SAFELY for Mass. Unfortunately, it's much more complicated than simply unlocking our doors. Gathering SAFELY for Mass will require significant changes. Additionally, now that our economy is opening up a bit, many of us are concerned about a second wave of the coronavirus. For everyone's safety, I'm reluctant to begin gathering again for worship until we get a better sense of how well this recent lifting of restrictions is proceeding. In my judgment, we're at least a few weeks away.

That being said, here is a summary of the changes – all of which have been designed with your safety and the safety of others in mind – that we will implement at Saint Mary's as soon as I believe it is prudent for us to proceed.

- **MASS SCHEDULE**
 - Bishop McClory extended the dispensation from Sunday worship until August 15 so **we will not be resuming our regular public Mass schedule** for awhile.
 - We will be celebrating an abridged Mass schedule - **not our regular schedule - on a RESERVATION ONLY basis.** This allows us to control the number of people in the church building, provide social distancing space and adequately clean and disinfect pews and other hard surfaces before and after Mass.
- We're asking parishioners age 65 and older, and those with chronic illness to stay at home and continue worshipping online. This is not intended to exclude anyone – but to better ensure the health and safety of those at greater risk.

- Seating inside the church is SEVERELY LIMITED – 36 spots – in order to insure a safe distance from others – so if you have a desire to attend Mass inside Saint Mary’s Church **YOU MUST REGISTER** for an invitation – and then **wait** to be invited. **NO WALK INS.**
- When you are notified that you can attend a Mass – you’ll be given a date and time for the celebration. **It will not follow our regular Mass schedule.**
- The doors will be unlocked 30 minutes before Mass. Come to the EAST DOOR wearing a mask – free of cough and fever. You will check-in and receive your seating assignment. A guide will take you to your assigned pew.
- Certain pews have been marked for seating – while others are closed – so as to maintain appropriate levels of social distancing.
- Everyone will enter thru the doors on the EAST SIDE of the church. **NO ONE WILL ENTER THRU JOLIET STREET DOORS.**
- Everyone is required to **WEAR A MASK** – and hand sanitizers will be located near the door.
- No Sacristans and no Altar Servers until further notice.
- No Ushers and no Greeters until further notice.
Donations can be dropped in a basket – or mailed to the office – or electronic giving.
- No Choirs until further notice. There’s a risk that congregational singing spreads the virus.
- No Lectors will be scheduled until further notice.
- No Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion will be scheduled until further notice.
- The CHOIR LOFT IS CLOSED until further notice – with this notable exception: the media technicians.
- A DIRECTIVE FROM THE DIOCESE: Remove your mask to receive the Eucharist – and then replace your mask. The Precious Blood will not be distributed until further notice – and all are asked to receive the consecrated host with an open hand. Receiving Holy Communion on the tongue poses a serious health risk to others: the priest, deacon or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and the people receiving Holy Communion after you. However, if you insist on receiving the Eucharist on the tongue, you will be accommodated after Mass – after the minister thoroughly washes hands before and afterward – to reduce the possibility of infecting the communicant or anyone else.
- At the end of Mass, pews will be dismissed in an orderly manner that observes proper social distancing – and after Mass, the building will be closed to sanitize and disinfect.

BAPTISMS have been postponed – but we hope to resume soon. The Sacrament of Baptism – for the foreseeable future – will be celebrated privately with only a limited number of family or friends – observing social distancing. Again, these measures are designed with your safety at heart. When you're ready to proceed, send a message to churchoffice@stmarycp.org

FIRST COMMUNIONS were postponed – with the hope we might be able to safely gather in a large group later. I don't anticipate this can happen before Autumn. However, if this will not work for your family (for an important reason) – contact Mrs. Weeks: mweeks@stmarycp.org

CONFIRMATION was postponed and will be rescheduled by the Diocese.

MARRIAGES: Some couples moved forward and celebrated the Sacrament of Marriage – making the necessary adjustments to conform with the social distancing restrictions. Other couples rescheduled their wedding. Looking ahead: for the foreseeable future – the maximum seating in Saint Mary's Church is drastically reduced to 36 spots. Many of the traditional parts of wedding celebrations will need to be tailored for your safety, the safety of your guests and the safety of our priest.

CONFESSIONS: I have been struggling to find a safe way to serve you in this way. I am told that my age and complicated health history makes me very vulnerable to contract the virus. When I find a way that is safe for all – it will be posted on our parish app (text APP to 88202).

DAILY MASS is presently available on-line: www.wordonfire.org. When we are ready to safely resume daily Mass at Saint Mary's, it will be posted on our parish app (text APP to 88202).

Again, please recall that the **Bishops of Indiana extended until August 15 the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday**. For those among us who are over the age of 65 – or at risk because of other health issues: stay at home! We continue to provide an on-line Mass on Sunday morning. That being said, if anyone has a desire to attend Mass inside Saint Mary's Church, **YOU CANNOT SIMPLY WALK IN – YOU NEED TO RECEIVE AN INVITATION** – and those details are enclosed with this letter.

The time-lines suggested in this letter are tentative – depending on how we as a people control the spread of the illness that has claimed so many lives – including our own Saint Mary's parishioners. Updates will be posted on our parish app and our parish website.

Finally, I implore your prayers for everyone suffering the effects of the virus – mindful of families from Saint Mary's who grieve the loss of loved ones who contracted the virus and died.

In Christ,

Father Pat