

**March 31, 2020**

## **Guidelines for returning to Mass at St. Christine's Marshfield**

First and Foremost, WELCOME BACK! It is such a blessing to be able to gather with you all again around the Altar of God for our Sunday Worship at Mass! As we reopen our Churches, it is important that we are on the same page for the safety of all, but also for reverent and prayerful celebrations of the Mass. Once again, the faithful are all reminded that Cardinal O'Malley has extended the dispensation from attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days until further notice. Anyone considered to be at high risk, experiencing any symptoms or feeling sick in any way should stay home and participate by following Masses online at Catholic TV. Recognizing that the pandemic persists, the Archdiocese has made the following statement: "The dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation will continue for the foreseeable future. Cardinal Seán strongly encourages people in vulnerable populations, especially the elderly and those with complicating physical conditions, to continue to watch Mass from their homes on Catholic TV."

Mass is inherently a high-risk activity, given that it involves many people gathering indoors for a prolonged period of time. Whether you are healthy or "high risk" (anyone over 60, immunocompromised, with a heart condition or diabetes, or who has any other serious underlying medical conditions), your safety and health during worship is the highest priority. I encourage each of you to discern what is best for your own health and the health of your family and your communities, and to consult with your doctor when appropriate. Should you decide that staying at home is safer, we respect and honor your decision. We operate in this way out of caution and, even more so, out of love. God entrusts us to care for one another. In Mark 12:31, Jesus says, "...Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." God draws us together as followers of Christ; yet, in this pandemic, loving our neighbor means keeping our distance, wearing masks when not at home and staying apart. We pray for wisdom and fortitude in this long period of social distancing and we pray for the time we can all worship together safely.

In order to open churches for the celebration of Mass, we must all follow the Massachusetts guidelines for safety and social distancing. It is

important to remember that these directives and guidelines are not intended to be permanent adjustments to normal practice but temporary responses to the pandemic. Everyone's patience, understanding and cooperation will be needed as we all adjust to these procedures. I am encouraging everyone to use prudence and common sense and for everyone to take personal responsibility for their safety and the safety of their neighbor. Please be kind and charitable above all.

Public celebration of Mass will resume on Saturday evening, May 30, 2020 at 5:00 pm, the Vigil of Pentecost. Sunday Masses for this week will be 7:00 am, 9:00 am and 11:30 am. Please note well that since we just celebrated Memorial Day, we will be changing our 11:30 to 11:00 am the next week, but since we haven't been together for so long, this week will be 11:30 am. There is a possibility that we will not be able to open St. Theresa's Chapel this summer, but I will wait to make that final decision. We have made arrangements to have the church cleaned after every Mass but again ask for your cooperation and assistance. I am asking everyone to please bring his or her own hand sanitizer and to use it before entering the church, before receiving Holy Communion and upon leaving the Church. I am so grateful to volunteers who will take up the task of sanitizing and cleaning. Because our Church's size, the 40% capacity rule instituted by the governor will likely affect us and limit us to 140 to each Mass and so we must be mindful of our numbers at each Mass. Once the Church has reached its capacity, no one else will be allowed in the Church. My biggest concern is obviously trying not to turn anyone away. Because we must keep a count of all entering, I am asking that everyone enter through the main front doors of the Church (please exit through the side doors). I know that some churches are using an on-line registration or a ticketing service to provide entrance into the Churches; I don't think that is the best option for us here, especially for our elderly and those who don't use the Internet. We will use the principle of "First Come, First Served."

"Unfortunately, once we reach our capacity, we will have to turn people away and ask them to attend another Mass, which I will honestly say breaks my heart to even think about telling people they are not free to enter but we must abide by these regulations. If this becomes an issue, we will reevaluate.

Once you enter the Church, an usher will direct you. Some parts of the Church are for families: some are for one or two people. Please do not sit where there is Blue tape under any circumstances. As you proceed to your

seat, you will notice that every other pew has been roped off. Please respect these markers and sit only in available pews. I am sorry if “Your Pew” is not available. Families may sit together but please don’t sit within 6 feet of another person/family. This will mean that some of you who normally sit in the far back of the church may need to sit a bit closer to the front. You will notice a couple of things: There will be no Holy Water in the fonts. There will be no hymnals and missalettes. There will be no offertory procession of the gifts of bread and wine or collection baskets. There will be no Sign of Peace. The family room (cry room) will not be available. The use of face masks/coverings is recommended by the CDC and required and mandated by the Governor of the Commonwealth, unless unable because of a medical condition or under the age of two –please see the State Guidelines for more info.

Priests and Liturgical ministers will not wear masks during the celebration of Mass but will wear them during the distribution of Holy Communion. In the very beginning in this process of reopening, the priest who is celebrating will do the readings and be the only one to distribute Holy Communion. In the weeks to come, the use of other ministers will be evaluated. During this time, the use of servers, adult and children, is prohibited due to social distancing. The reception of Holy Communion may only be received in the hand. For the time being, communion on the tongue has been suspended. While we will still have music at Masses, congregational singing is discouraged at this time.

### **The Reception of Holy Communion**

1. Only the priest will be distributing Holy Communion.
2. If you don’t feel comfortable receiving Holy Communion, I encourage you to continue to make a “Spiritual Communion.”
3. You will come to Communion by section at the direction of the priest. Both side pews first, each separately, then the two middle sections forming always only one line while always socially distancing. You will exit by the side doors after receiving communion. Do not return to the pew
4. Priests will wear masks while they are distributing Holy Communion and in close contact with communicants who will also be wearing masks.
5. Social distancing must be maintained during the Communion procession. I am asking everyone to come forward using the center

aisle forming a single file and maintaining appropriate social distance.

6. Please come to the one of the Communion Station in front of the altar.
7. Masks must be worn when coming forward to receive Holy Communion. The priest will hold the consecrated host over the communicants' outstretched hands and place the host into their hands without touching their hands. Communicants will receive the consecrated host in their hands, step to the side, lower their mask, consume the host, replace their mask, and after the Eucharist is consumed immediately exit the Church by the side doors.
8. In the case of unintentional contact, the priest will sanitize his own hands immediately
9. All must leave the Church using the side doors immediately after receiving communion. The priest will have already given the final blessing. Please no congregating. Please remain socially distant.

Upon entering the Church, you will notice baskets at the back of the church and large collection boxes at the front of the church clearly marked for your weekly donation; please place your weekly donation in that box as you enter or exit the Church. As always, thank you for your continued support of the parish. I continue to encourage the use of online giving to make it easier for everyone.

Since not everyone should or will be able to attend Sunday Mass, as I have mentioned in earlier columns, once we begin to offer Sunday Mass in our church, we would like to "live stream" the Mass for those unable to participate, especially those who are homebound, travelling, or just not able to get to church. To do so, however, we will need to install the necessary camera and audio connections. Obviously, we have limited financial resources at this time. Those with the means to help in making "live streams" possible from our church (not only for the present but for years to come as well) are invited to contact me and I will happily share with them the cost details of the project.

Finally, other than the distribution of Holy Communion, I will and must maintain social distancing when greeting people before and after Mass. The faithful are encouraged not to congregate before or after Masses. We

are taking every precaution to ensure everyone's safety and also to maintain reverence and prayerfulness during the Holy Mass according to our Catholic Tradition. We may need to make adjustments to these guidelines as we move forward. Any changes will be communicated with you and they will be posted on our website. I am asking for your help in sharing these guidelines with your family and friends, especially older and younger parishioners who may not use the internet or fully understand all of the changes and precautions and may think that we are immediately returning to normal. Please email me directly, (frsteveboyle@gmail.com) if you have any questions or concerns. Please be patient with me as I take all things into consideration while trying my best to provide for your spiritual needs and safety. Again, WELCOME BACK! I am filled with great joy to be reopening our parish Church and to seeing you all again. God Bless you and God Love you. And so do I. Fr. Steve