

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

It appears to me that when we get to this coming Pentecost weekend, Fr. Brian and I will not be seeing a whole lot of you. Fr. Brian will be presiding at St. Dominic. I will be at St. John of God and St. Francis of Assisi. Next weekend ... just the opposite. Of our three parishes in our Mt. Hope Catholic Community, the only one of the parishes that will see attendance at the "limit" will be St. Dominic, mostly because the size of the church limits how many we can admit. The small numbers at all three parishes DELIGHT me as your pastor. In all honesty, I think that we in New England are opening up our churches earlier than we should. However, because the New England bishops have given the "green light" I feel compelled to offer the opportunity for Mass. The diocesan guideline have recommended that in parish grouping like our own, that Mass be celebrated in ONE location only. I don't think that is particularly fair considering that we have parishioners who live between the Taunton River and a ways into Seekonk. We cover a large territory!

You may be aware that there are parishes in our general area who are having multiple Mass per day per weekend. In all honestly, I will not do that because it puts your health and mine at risk. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has told us that the virus which we are battling can linger on surfaces and in the air for days. The CDC directives for places of worship recommend that there be one service per site. After the service, windows should be open for at least one hour and then be closed. The worship site should be locked and not entered for at least 24 hours. At that point, the worship space may be sanitized.

Why 24 hours? The answer given by the CDC is that the virus/bacteria's can linger in the air. After 24 hours, they will have fallen either to the floor or whatever stops them above the floor. At that point then, the worship spaces can be confidently sanitized. If we attempt to sanitize within an hour of Mass, or less than 24 hours, our attempts will be useless and we won't be able to guarantee that we have sanitized properly or even to a point of safety. I know that there are other parishes that are having Mass every 2 hours. Honestly, it is impossible for them to properly sanitize their church according to the CDC guidelines. And of course, I cannot be answerable for the decision of other pastors but only for myself. However, Fr. Albino, Deacon Gary and I are all on the same page, so to speak, in our plan of reopening as we are all in agreement that the physical health of our parishioners must be put ahead of a rush to reopen.

As I mentioned in a past note, we have ordered and are awaiting sanitizing equipment which we anticipate will arrive sometime in the first half of June. Once we receive them and experiment with them, then hopefully we can expand our schedule. In the meantime, it is not my intention to put anyone at risk. Is it inconvenient??? You bet your bottom dollar that it is!!! Is it what I would have planned or hoped for??? Not even close. However I prefer to be cautious and minimize to the extent possible any possibility of any one of us being exposed to COVID-19. This virus is serious. This virus is deadly. This virus is still very much present in Southeastern New England. As your pastor, I would much prefer for you to be longing at home for the Eucharist than to be celebrating the cemetery prayers for you as I have already done for some of our Mt. Hope parishioners. This will end eventually. In the meantime, if we stay close to our Blessed Mother who herself longed to be reunited with her Ascended Son, then we will have the grace of patience in our waiting. In the meantime, for those of you who have chosen to stay

home because of your unwillingness to expose yourselves to risk or because of underlying illnesses or because of your age ... Thank you for using the God given gift of your intelligence. One of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit is WISDOM .. thank you for availing yourself of that holy gift by not putting yourself at risk!

Blessings!
Fr. Hamel