



Mt. Hope Catholic Community

St. John of God / St. Francis of Assisi / St. Dominic

May 18, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Earlier today Gov. Charlie Baker gave permission for churches and religious groups to open up for worship services. I know that the news has excited a good many people and a lot of folks are wondering just when we're going to be able to start having Mass in church again. After I wrote the first draft of this, I received notice from the Bishops office that we can resume Mass at the Vigil of Pentecost.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has issued safety standards for places of worship that we will need to follow strictly at all three locations. The first limit is that we will be allowed to have no more than 40% of the building's maximum occupancy level. When we were beginning the pastoral planning phase, each of our churches were re-measured in terms of how many people per church. When most of our churches were built, the seating was based on 18" per person per seat. Because of the "widening" of America in the past number of years, it has been revised to 22" per person per seat. So with the 40% rule:

St. Francis of Assisi - 40% of 448 = 179 persons per Mass

St. Dominic Church - 40% of 217 = 86 persons per Mass

St. John of God - 40% of 425 = 170 persons per Mass

Because of social distancing, it is going to be necessary to rope off certain pews and allow people to sit only in designated spots. **Persons of the same household (not with relatives of a different household)** may be seated together. There are also regulations about face masks, sanitizing the entire churches after **each** service, recommendations about how to allow people into the church and then out once Mass is finished. It's going to be a chore..no doubt about it. It's going to cause a lot of problems I suspect too **because once a quota is reached, no others will be permitted into the church.**

I've already sent an email to both Fr. Albino and Deacon Gary to let them know that all three of us will have to wear face masks for the duration of the Mass. Because health officials are telling us that the COVID-19 virus can be communicated simply by speaking, and not only by coughs or sneezes, the three of us will have to be wearing masks at the altar which means wearing one while saying each and every prayer of the Mass. The most obvious problem that I anticipate by this is that many of you, even if you have excellent hearing, may have difficulty understanding just what we are saying since our voices will be somewhat muffled and not well broadcast by the microphones. But if the virus can be spread by speaking, and we have by necessity open ciboria on the altar with hosts to be consecrated, then a mask is mandatory for the three of us. At communion time, rows will have to be allowed one at a time to maintain distances. We will also give instructions on HOW to receive when we get back to Mass since you will have to have your mask on when the host is placed in your hand. It's going to be a very, very different type of experience and we are all, from the youngest to the most senior, going to have to show great patience - with ourselves, with others, with the newness of the experience.

Because of everything that is going to be involved, particularly with sanitizing the spaces after each Mass, we will be needing help from the community. We can't simply expect that Tony/St. Francis - John & Carlos/St. John of God - Peter/ St. Dominic will sanitize the churches by themselves. They are going to need regular and faithful help because it's too much for them alone. We are also going to need reliable ushers to seat people once they're admitted into the churches, let people know when they can go forward by row to receive communion, and finally to dismiss people by row at the end of Mass. Realize that every pew, seated in or not, every door handle, and railing ... anything that people can touch in the church will need to be sanitized. If you think that you can be of help, please do not be afraid to step forward. WE NEED HELP!

One last thing. Because the virus can be on any surface, we will be removing all missalettes and hymnals from the pews. Ushers will hopefully be able to give you a sheet with the chapter and verse of the Mass readings so that you can pray with them during the week, the responsorial psalm, and possibly the words of songs if that can be coordinated with the various music ministers. We will need to work out the kinks.

I am also including at the end of this note the full text that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has issued for Places of Worship / MA Safety Standards. Please go through the regulations so that you will be familiar with them and help us to fill in any gaps that we might omit. And in the meantime, let us continue to pray for each other in our Mt. Hope Catholic Community. This isn't the end of the world! We will get through all of this! Hopefully it'll make us stronger!!!

Blessings!

Fr. Hamel

PLACES OF WORSHIP

MA Safety Standards

SOCIAL DISTANCING

MANDATORY

SAFETY STANDARDS

All places of worship shall limit occupancy to 40 percent of the building's maximum permitted occupancy level as documented in its occupancy permit on record with the municipal building department or other

municipal record holder. The occupant count shall include all persons inside the place of worship, including attendees and staff.

Staff or attendants shall monitor the number of attendees entering the place of worship to ensure compliance with the maximum occupancy level.

Attendees who are not part of the same immediate household must be seated at least 6 feet apart. Members of the same immediate household are permitted to sit together and less than 6 feet apart.

If there is fixed seating, rows should be blocked off and kept empty to allow for sufficient distancing between rows.

All attendees and staff must wear face coverings or masks in accordance with COVID-19 Order No. 31 and the Department of Public Health's Guidance while inside and while entering and exiting places of worship or otherwise participating in in-person services, except where a person is unable to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or disabling condition.

For children between age 2 and 5, the wearing of a face covering or mask is at the discretion of the child's parent or guardian. Children under the age of 2 should not wear a face covering or mask.

A person who declines to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or disabling condition shall not be required to produce documentation verifying the condition.

Places of worship may refuse entry to a person who refuses to wear a face covering or mask for non-medical reasons.

Recommended best practices

If feasible, places of worship are encouraged to arrange online sign-up for services in advance in order to monitor and limit the number of attendees.

Places of worship are encouraged to place tape or other visual distancing markings on seating to delineate 6 foot separations and to post signage indicating the maximum number of persons permitted per row.

Promote ventilation for enclosed spaces where possible. For example, consider opening windows and doors to allow airflow

Places of worship are encouraged to take steps to encourage orderly entering and exiting of services in a manner that encourages social distancing. For example:

- Signage or floor markings should be posted to have one-way aisles or otherwise direct attendees to follow certain pathways for entering and exiting the service.
- If a line forms outside of the service, those waiting should be directed to maintain social distancing. Tape or other markings on the ground outside of places of worship should be placed to encourage attendees to maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet.
- Staff should direct people in high traffic areas to help maintain social distancing.
- Officiants or other staff should direct successive, row-by-row exiting

Places of worship shall ensure that attendees and employees have access to handwashing facilities, including soap and running water, and allow employees sufficient break time to wash hands, as necessary.

Recommended best practices

They are also encouraged to make alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol available, if possible.

Places of worship shall not have communal gathering pre or post service (e.g., coffee hours or other food services). Places of worship running food pantries or other prepackage food distribution may continue to do so.

Any childcare services shall remain closed until such time that there is additional guidance.

If a place of worship learns that an attendee or employee or other worker has tested positive for COVID-19, it shall notify the local Board of Health (LBOH) in the city or town where the place of worship is located and assist the LBOH as reasonably requested to trace likely contacts and advise contacts to isolate and self-quarantine.

Recommended best practices

Places of worship are encouraged to modify the means to collect any financial contributions from attendees so as to eliminate shared contribution trays and baskets and to minimize contact. Consider setting up a no-touch method to collect contributions, and encouraging contributions through mail or electronic means.

Places of worship are encouraged to modify communal rituals, like taking communion or passing of the peace, so as to limit contact with others. Consider distributing, where applicable, prepackaged communion or sacraments.

Places of worship shall be cleaned and disinfected between each service, including disinfection of heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, bathrooms, microphones, shared instruments).

If a place of worship learns that an individual with COVID-19 attended a service or otherwise entered the place of worship, it shall conduct a deep cleaning and disinfecting consistent with the Centers for Disease Control guidance

HYGIENE PROTOCOLS

STAFFING & OPERATIONS

CLEANING & DISINFECTING

PLACES OF WORSHIP

MA COVID-19 Checklist

SOCIAL DISTANCING

Ensure >6ft between individuals

All places of worship shall limit occupancy to 40 percent of the building's maximum permitted occupancy level as documented in its occupancy permit on record with the municipal building department or other municipal record holder. The occupant count shall include all persons inside the place of worship, including attendees and staff.

Monitor the number of attendees entering the place of worship to ensure compliance with the maximum occupancy level.

Attendees who are not part of the same immediate household must be seated at least 6 feet apart. Members of the same immediate household are permitted to sit together and less than 6 feet apart.

If there is fixed seating, rows should be blocked off and kept empty to allow for sufficient distancing between rows.

All attendees and staff must wear face coverings or masks in accordance with COVID-19 Order No. 31 and the Department of Public Health's Guidance while inside and while entering and exiting places of worship or otherwise participating in in-person services, except where a person is unable to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or disabling condition.

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Places of worship are encouraged to place tape or other visual distancing markings on seating to delineate 6 foot separations and to post signage indicating the maximum number of persons permitted per row.

Promote ventilation for enclosed spaces where possible. For example, consider opening windows and doors to allow airflow

Places of worship are encouraged to take steps to encourage orderly entering and exiting of services in a manner that encourages social distancing

HYGIENE PROTOCOLS

Apply robust hygiene protocols

Ensure that attendees and employees have access to handwashing facilities, including soap and running water, and allow employees sufficient break time to wash hands, as necessary. Places of worship are also encouraged to make alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol available, if possible.

STAFFING & OPERATIONS

Include safety procedures in the operations

Places of worship shall not have communal gathering pre or post service (e.g., coffee hours or other food services). Places of worship running food pantries or other prepackage food distribution may continue to do so.

Any childcare services shall remain closed until such time that there is additional guidance.

If a place of worship learns that an attendee or employee or other worker has tested positive for COVID-19, it shall notify the local Board of Health (LBOH) in the city or town where the place of worship is located and assist the LBOH as reasonably requested to trace likely contacts and advise contacts to isolate and self-quarantine.

Places of worship are encouraged to modify the means to collect any financial contributions from attendees so as to eliminate shared contribution trays and baskets and to minimize contact. Consider setting up a no-touch method to collect contributions, and encouraging contributions through mail or electronic means.

Places of worship are encouraged to modify communal rituals, like taking communion or passing of the peace, so as to limit contact with others. Consider distributing, where applicable, prepackaged communion or sacraments.

CLEANING & DISINFECTING

Incorporate robust hygiene protocols

Places of worship shall be cleaned and disinfected between each service, including disinfection of heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, bathrooms, microphones, shared instruments).

If a place of worship learns that an individual with COVID-19 attended a service or otherwise entered the place of worship, it shall conduct a deep cleaning and disinfecting consistent with the Centers for Disease Control guidance