

Subject: Reopening Plan for St. Joseph Church amid COVID-19

Hello St. Joseph family,

I pray that you and your loved ones are healthy. As you may have seen, Bishop Braxton, together with Cardinal Cupich and the Bishops of Illinois recently shared their multi-phased plan for reopening churches in the six dioceses of Illinois. Specifically,

- Phase I allows for parishes to reopen for Baptism, Reconciliation, Weddings and Funerals with a limit of 10 attendees (excluding ministers).
- Phase IA allows for parishes to reopen for private prayer and adoration with a limit of 10 attendees (excluding ministers).
- Phase II allows for reopening for weekday and weekend Masses for larger groups depending on the guidelines from the state and the capacity of the church building. We do not have a timetable for Phase II, but no weekday or Sunday Masses with a congregation of any size are allowed until we reach this phase.

Our St. Joseph Reopening Plan

First and foremost, it is important for everyone to understand that our efforts will prioritize the safety and wellbeing of all while maintaining due respect and reverence for the sacraments and liturgical norms of our faith.

I will assemble a Parish Reopening Leadership Team to lead our efforts. Together, we will attend required training to ensure that our parish reopening plan conforms to the guidelines developed by the diocese in collaboration with civil and healthcare authorities. We will also assemble a starter kit of protective and cleaning supplies, as well as guidance on purchasing/maintaining supplies ongoing.

Volunteers Needed

We will need volunteers to assist with various aspects of our parish reopening plan. Importantly, leadership team members and volunteers should not be part of a “vulnerable population” (that is, not over the age of 65; no underlying medical condition such as diabetes; lung disease; undergoing cancer treatment, etc.), if possible. I ask all of you who are younger than 65 and healthy with no underlying health conditions to consider assisting with one of three reopening teams:

- Set-up team. Sample duties include ensuring that all supplies needed for each sacramental celebration/gathering are ready for use, entrances and exits are marked and propped physically open prior to attendees’ arrival/departure, windows are opened, etc.
- Greeting team. Sample duties include assisting in managing the flow of congregants as they enter the church, making sure attendees use hand sanitizer upon entering, are wearing a mask, and are reminded not to enter if ill; directing people to appropriate seating/waiting areas, etc.
- Cleaning team. Sample duties include maintaining and cleaning essential and trafficked areas of the church before and after the church has been used. Masks and gloves will be provided, if you do not have your own, in addition to approved cleaning/disinfecting supplies.

The Reopening Leadership Team and I will make sure that all volunteers are properly trained. Please send an email message to stjosephbentonil@gmail.com to indicate your willingness and ability to volunteer. From those that step forward, we will also request that some act as volunteer captains to help lead each of the three teams.

Timing for Our Reopening

As I mentioned, the Parish Reopening Leadership Team members and I will need to complete required training, which will take place late in the week of May 17. Once we complete the training, we will need to review and complete tasks assigned to all parishes as part of the reopening process provided by the diocese. Therefore, the soonest that any parish in the diocese will realistically open for sacramental celebrations (weddings, funerals, reconciliation) is likely the weekend of May 30; private prayer or Eucharistic Adoration, will follow when we are ready. However, our parish, like all others in the diocese, will move forward at a pace and timing appropriate for its own situation.

Following our training webinar, at St. Joseph, we will only open our church once the Reopening Leadership Team and I feel confident that we have the right volunteers in place to make it possible to reopen. Again, the need for parishioner assistance cannot be overstated.

The guidelines and measures required to reopen are designed to protect our wellbeing and that of our broader community. As we learn from the first pages of Scripture, we indeed are “our brother’s keeper.” Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed, “that they all may be one” (Jn 17:21) and commanded us “love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34). Our collective patience, willingness to help and the care we take to reopen is a demonstration of our unity and love for one another.

May God grant you His peace during this difficult time and may He manifest His love and presence to you in abundant ways. If you have any questions, please contact me at 618-438-9941, or by email at stjosephbentonil@gmail.com.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Urban Osuji

Pastor

St. Joseph Catholic Church