

May 23, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

These have been very exciting days! Finally, after a long two months of shut-down, we have been given the opportunity to begin to re-open our churches for public worship. I say, "begin," because I hope that everyone is aware that this will be a process, not a singular moment. We cannot simply turn the lights on and start celebrating masses the way we did before. There will be many changes that must be planned-for so this can happen properly. Just as your weekly shopping trip to the supermarket has undergone significant changes, so, too, will our return to church.

To begin with, attendance at **mass will be by advanced-reservation only**. As of this writing, we are still finalizing which method will work best, but any parishioner wishing to attend a live weekend mass will have to do this by making a reservation online or over the phone first. The reason for this is because our churches will have very limited seating capacity in order to comply with the Governor's directives on reopening and also to allow for proper 6-foot social distancing in the pews. Each church will be clearly marked where someone can sit, and also, where people may not. **Parishioners must sit only in the marked positions in the pew**. Couples or families may need to occupy more than one seating position or an entire pew to maintain distance from their neighbor.

While at church from the moment you leave your car in the parking lot to the time when you return to your car, **all parishioners must wear a face mask**. Only those with medical conditions that make wearing a mask difficult (such as those with asthma) or young children are exempt. Otherwise, anyone 6 years old or older are asked to bring a mask with them and wear it for the entire duration of the mass.

All **parishioners are asked to properly wash their hands** vigorously with soap and water prior to coming to mass. Parishioners are also asked to bring with them a small bottle of hand sanitizer and use it liberally during the mass in the event they've come into contact with any surfaces or objects. Good hygiene is important for all!

While on parish property, all parishioners will be required to **maintain a social-distance of 6 feet** or more from one another. There will be markings on the floor to assist with this. While heading to your seats and also while in the communion procession, please be sure not to get any closer than 6 feet from the person in front of you. This will require extra patience on everyone's part, so please come prepared to spend a little more time doing the things that we have done habitually or without much thought in times past.

All **collections will be taken up by means of deposit boxes at the entrances of the churches**. Parishioners are asked to make their weekly contributions either on their way into mass or on their way out. There will be no passing of the baskets or offertory procession. Also, parishioners may continue to use the online-giving option, the "90-Days for Your Parish" online-giving program through the Archdiocese, or simply mail in their contributions. *However you choose to contribute, a hearty Thank you! for your continued support of your parishes!*

When it comes time for **Holy Communion**, parishioners will be asked to form a single Communion line in the center of the main aisles of each church, maintaining the necessary 6-foot distance from one another and keeping your face mask on as you do. Again, please watch for the markings on the floor to assist you with this. When it is your turn to approach the priest or Eucharistic Minister, extend both

arms with hands flattened, one upon another, and the priest or Eucharistic Minister will place the host toward your hand from the top down and gently drop it into your hand without contact. Keeping your hands flattened, please step away 6-feet from them, quickly lower your mask, place the host in your mouth and quickly replace your face mask so that it fully covers your mouth and nose. Then, keeping a 6-foot distance from anyone in front of you, please return to your seat by the side aisles only. At this time Holy Communion will be distributed in the hand only. The Precious Blood will not be distributed. Please be careful not to have any contact with the priest, Eucharistic Minister or any other parishioners. No one should have to climb over another person to enter or exit the pew. Please move out of the way for each other if necessary.

A few other things that will be different: There will be **no congregational singing during mass**. Although we will plan to have limited music at these celebrations, people are invited to enjoy the music in a reverent silence for now. All hymnals will be removed from the churches. No bulletins or other printed materials will be available prior to the start of mass, although eventually we hope to be distributing them after mass is over on the way out of church. All parishioners are encouraged to visit our Collaborative website (www.hriccatholic.org) prior to mass and follow the links for the readings to prepare for mass ahead of time. Even as we begin to celebrate public masses in our churches, **we will continue to improve-upon and offer our live-streamed masses online** which will be available through our website or on Facebook. You do not have to be a member of Facebook to participate in the mass online.

While we will be doing everything we can to make our celebrations in the churches as safe as possible for all those who attend them, it is important for **those who are in a high-risk category** for COVID-19 (the elderly, those who have compromised immune systems or those with multiple risk-factors) to **consider staying home** at this time and enjoy our live-streamed mass. We must insist that anyone who does feel ill or if you believe that you have been exposed to COVID-19 please stay home and consult with your physician. This is for your health as well as the health of our faith communities.

To enable all of this to happen, we are in need of **volunteers** who can help with the **cleaning** our churches before or after a public mass, people to assist as **greeters** and help direct parishioners to proper seating sections of the church and those who would be willing to serve as **Lectors and Eucharistic Ministers**. We are also looking for new people to **help with the live-streaming of our masses**. Additionally, we will be engaging professional cleaning services to ensure that our buildings are as clean and safe as possible for all who wish to use them. Please contact our office at info@newburyportcatholic.org for more information on how to volunteer or help.

Right now, we are planning on offering our first **Sunday masses on June 7th at both Immaculate Conception Church in Newburyport as well as St. Ann's in West Newbury**. Nativity Church in Merrimac is currently closed for a long-awaited interior painting that was planned for from Holy Redeemer's capital campaign of several years ago and will re-open a little later in June. To make your reservation to attend one of these masses, please watch our Collaborative website (www.hriccatholic.org) for more information in the days ahead. At this time, we are not ready to resume daily masses, but will do so after the launch of our Sunday masses and when proper arrangements can be made for cleaning, etc.

Confessions are available by appointment only and will be held outside in the fresh air and only when weather permits. Priest and penitent must wear face masks and maintain proper social-distancing throughout. Please contact our office at (978) 346-8604 or (978) 462-2724 to make an appointment.

Baptisms and Weddings are allowed to take place, subject to all of the above criteria. Again, please contact our office for additional information. We will begin to offer **Funerals** in our churches very soon. More information will be available shortly. Additionally, we will plan to re-open our **Collaborative office** in June. Again, more information will be available shortly on how and when that will happen.

The Archdiocese of Boston has released a short video on YouTube to help us prepare for returning to mass in what is now the "new normal." Please take a moment and watch it before venturing forth into any of our churches in the weeks ahead. <https://youtu.be/vLkFzkVgUjM>

In all of this I would ask for your prayers that our collective efforts to resume public worship may be fruitful and safe for all concerned. It will be a great blessing from the Lord to be able to share in the Eucharist together once again, even under these limited circumstances. I am grateful for all that you do to help strengthen our parishes and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I deeply appreciate your witness of faith and evangelical patience!

May the Lord bless us all richly in the days to come!

Fr. Timothy Harrison
Pastor