

COVID-19 Reopening – Phase III
The Catholic Church in East St. James Parish

Bishop Michael Duca sent a letter to the priests and deacons on the Diocese of Baton Rouge on Friday, September 18, moving the Diocese into *Phase III Reopening* under the COVID-19 protocols. While most of the precautions must remain in effect, as a Catholic Church we are trying to move forward into more activities focused on helping maintain the health-safety of everyone concerned.

This document showing our cluster's application of Phase III has been delayed because of many day-to-day obligations, but much of this is already in place. My apologies to all parishioners!

Civil protocols now allow church gatherings to increase to 75% of capacity. However, we are still obliged to maintain the **6-foot social distance protocol**. We have managed to increase the available spaces in each church to accommodate the increased number of people returning to worship.

	Sacred Heart	St. Joseph	Prompt Succor	St. Michael
seating capacity	16 singles 24 couples 16 families (4 per) 128 person max.	14 singles 52 couples 16 families (4 per) 182 person max.	38 singles 29 couples 96 person max.	17 singles 29 couples 29 families (4 per) 191 person max.

Our churches are still using the **Blue Tape** to designate where people can sit; it marks the *back* of the sitting space. I appreciate that other churches have marked off where NOT to sit. Please note: we have marked **WHERE TO SIT**, hoping this would be easier to understand than crossing out every place not available. Many have become comfortable with this designation, and we still have volunteers to help people find appropriate places for Mass.

I am asking everyone to remain vigilant about the 6-foot social distance, not only while being seated in the pew but also when entering the church, processing toward Communion, and especially when exiting the church at the end of Mass. It is certainly easy to forget and become “bunched up” while standing and/or walking, so please try to be as conscientious as possible. I know it is human nature to be social, but the virus is still around, and people are still carriers and becoming sick. So, let’s continue to do our part, please.

Even though the **social distance protocol** applies to each household, I am willing to allow households which *regularly intermingle* to sit next to each other during Mass. This happens especially at funerals, weddings, and when there are special ceremonies such as when we welcomed our Confirmation candidates and allowed their sponsors to sit side-by-side with them. Please consider coming to Mass together to allow for the increased number of people in church to fit within the designated spaces.

Whenever attending Mass – Sunday, weekday, funeral, wedding, or other – **everyone is still expected to wear a face mask while in the church building.**

WHY WEAR A FACE MASK?

From the beginning we have heard and repeated this truth: the common face mask does *not* protect the wearer from the virus. It is meant, in case we are carriers, to help protect the people around us. Sadly, some have turned the wearing/not wearing of a face mask into a political issue of liberty versus government control. Allow me to say, I would never want to infringe on a person's freedom to be self-determining; in fact, that is a moral right for every mature person. I *believe* that I am not a carrier of the coronavirus; however, I do not have 100% certainty that I am not merely asymptomatic. Therefore, not because I am "ordered" to wear it, but because I believe it is my Christian responsibility to care for the well-being of others that I *choose* to wear a face mask. It is bothersome and inconvenient to say the least, but every other person around me, friend or stranger, deserves me to treat them with care and concern. So wearing a mask shows respect for others. I do not mean to "shame" anyone into wearing a mask, but I do believe in the common decency of church-going Christians. So I am simply reminding everyone that Christians traditionally forego personal freedom in order to show love and respect for others; the *virtue of respect* is a higher reason to do good regardless of what it costs us personally.

RELAXATION OF THE FACE MASK PROTOCOL.

The Bishop has allowed the following "relaxation" of the face mask protocol:

Whenever a person is sitting still and/or not vocalizing or singing, that person can loosen the face mask by dropping it below his/her nose. Everyone is asked to keep the mask on, even if loosened, so that it can be quickly lifted above the nose when necessary.

- However:
1. Whenever a person is moving about in the church – entering, exiting, going to and from Communion – the face mask must be worn *fully covering the nose and the mouth*. We are catching our breath droplets in the mask to protect the people and surfaces around us from the potential of transferring the virus.
 2. Whenever a person is vocalizing a prayer or singing a hymn, the face mask must be worn fully. The celebrant, deacon, reader, and cantor are allowed to remove the mask at these times only so they can be picked up well by the microphone. And they are obliged to be 6-foot distant from any other worshiper.

RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION WHILE WEARING A FACE MASK.

As has been said, when coming forward to receive Holy Communion, people in the same household are not obliged to the 6-foot protocol, but separate households are required to keep that distance. We are moving forward toward a "double line," (left and right sides of the center aisle) for Holy Communion, so the Celebrant and an Extraordinary Minister will be offering Holy Communion in the hand. This makes it all the more important for people walking up for Communion to have the face mask completely covering the nose and mouth.

1. Keep the social distance between households while moving from the pew and returning to the pew for Holy Communion.
2. When approaching the Celebrant or Minister, please extend your arms fully (straighten elbows and raise arms to chest height).

3. Receive the Blessed Sacrament in **ONE** (1) hand – usually the non-dominant hand – and close your fingers over the Host to protect it from falling. **DO NOT** immediately take the Host in the fingers of your dominant hand.
4. Move 6 feet away from the Communion Station, then using your free hand, remove the mask from your mouth. Then, pick up the Host and place it into your mouth to receive Holy Communion.
5. After you are sure there are no fragments of the Blessed Sacrament on your hands, replace the mask over your nose and mouth, and return to your pew, observing the 6-foot social distance.

FUNERAL SERVICES

We are still not allowed to hold wakes or visitations in the church building before Funeral services, with or without a Mass. Wakes and visitations must take place at the funeral home of the family's choice, and the family must follow the protocols of that establishment.

For the Funeral Mass, face masks are required as with any Mass. Everyone, family included, must enter the church and find their places before the casket is brought to the altar in procession. The priest-celebrant leads the procession (funeral directors bring the casket forward), and he will bless the person and place the funeral pall over the casket without family assistance at this time.

Readers may remove their face masks only while reading. There is still no offertory of the bread and wine. Also, unless the family expects a large number of participants, the priest is the only Communion minister. We are still not using Altar servers during the Mass, so we will not use incense at the conclusion of the Mass.

Face masks and social distancing are still expected at the graveside service even though this is most likely outdoors.

WEDDING CEREMONIES

Protocols for Masses, i.e., face masks and 6ft social distancing, are still expected for weddings as for any Mass. *Wedding ushers* take the place of parish volunteers in helping guests find designated seating in the church. They must wear face masks themselves and remind all guests of this protocol.

Readers may remove their face masks only while reading. There is still no offertory of the bread and wine. Also, unless the couple expects a large number of guests, the priest is the only Communion minister.

Bishop Duca has allowed the following Phase III "*accommodation:*" the Bride and Groom, their parents and grandparents, and attendants walking in the wedding procession are dispensed from wearing face masks for the wedding. Please note, all other guests, including siblings, aunts and uncles, and cousins of any sort, are expected to wear face masks. This accommodation does **NOT** include the wedding rehearsal.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

We have returned to having Confession time available at the three parish churches before weekend Masses: 3:00 to 3:45pm on Saturday at St. Joseph; 7:00 to 7:45am on Sunday at St. Michael; and 4:00 to 4:45pm on Sunday at Sacred Heart. Please note: the Reconciliation Rooms at St. Joseph and St. Michael could be rearranged to maintain the required social distance protocol. The Reconciliation Room at Sacred Heart is too small, so we have arranged the Vesting sacristy near the front doors of the church for Reconciliation.

The Reconciliation Room at Prompt Succor Chapel in Lutcher is too small for social distancing, and we are preparing to reopen the Adoration Chapel, so daily Confessions remain suspended until further notice.

PERPETUAL ADORATION

We are in the process of reopening our Perpetual Adoration Chapel at Prompt Succor in Lutcher. However, we are far short of having enough commitments to fill each hour of the week. Our coordinators are still seeking new commitments, so please consider an hour each week in Adoration. We have so much for which we need to thank God, and spending time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament builds up the faith in anyone who participates in Adoration. Please help us reopen the Chapel very soon!

ST. MICHAEL GROTTTO

We are happy to announce that we are able to reopen St. Michael's Lourdes Grotto for more regular visits. Now, on **Sundays, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, from 9:00am to 4:00pm**, people will be able to visit the Grotto at St. Michael. *Please remember to use the handicap ramp side door to enter and exit the church.* The number in the Grotto at any one time must remain **limited to four (4) people maximum**. With the extra hours of availability, we hope regular visitors will find a good time each week for their visit.