

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT – MAY 16, 2021
Next phase of reopening

Considering recent developments from the civil authorities regarding COVID-19 measures, Archbishop Blair has announced two things:

- As of May 19, 2021, the covid-19 restrictions and procedures first implemented on May 27, 2020, in the document “Opening Churches for Public Worship in The Archdiocese of Hartford” are hereby revoked.
- As of Saturday, May 22, 2021, the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass in person on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation will no longer be in force.

Therefore, as of the **weekend of Pentecost Sunday (May22/23)**, there is an obligation again to participate at Mass. However, since the risk of infection, though diminished, still remains, the following individuals may very legitimately decide not yet to attend church: those suffering from serious pre-existing conditions making them more susceptible to covid-19; those who are ill or homebound or who are caregivers in close contact with someone who is; those who have tested positive for any contagious disease, including covid-19; and those who are in quarantine due to exposure to any contagion, or who reside with someone who is quarantined. And so, let us be clear, that persons with valid health concerns or even, for now, fears about the virus, should not feel constrained to come to church. And please be reminded that the Bishops of Connecticut made clear in an earlier announcement, there is nothing contrary to faith or morals that would prevent a person from being vaccinated against covid-19.

For those unable to attend due to the above descriptions, the live streaming of Masses will continue into the near future. The Archbishop reminds us, for those who are safely able to attend church in person that the livestreaming of Masses is not a substitute for attending face-to-face.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) will continue to be celebrated on Monday evenings at St. Elizabeth Seton Church at 6:00 p.m. in a large well-ventilated and safe room.

We will continue to maintain the present modified schedule of weekend Masses: **Saturday 4:00 p.m. at St. James, Sunday 9:00 a.m. at St. Elizabeth Seton and Sunday 11:00 a.m. at St. James.** We will be discerning the necessity of further adjustments to the schedule as we move ahead over the next few months. Another option is attendance at a regularly scheduled weekday Mass.

Given Governor Lamont’s declaration that “remaining restrictions will be lifted, except masks” on May 19, 2021, our churches can reopen to 100% capacity with no need for any specific social distancing.

- **Masks will be required for all who enter and remain in our churches.** *This requirement is still in place here despite the recent recommendations of the CDC. We have no way of evaluating who has received vaccination or not. We will play it safe. Those recently vaccinated are enjoying the benefits of greater mobility and access to social activities. So, it would benefit all to receive the vaccination, if able. President Biden and Governor Lamont have left it to the discretion of each venue about the necessity of masks. We have decided, for now, to require masks.*
- Reservations (online or by phone) will be discontinued.
- Temperatures and sign-in at entryways will be discontinued.

- Entry by either front or back doors at St. James will resume.
- Exposed holy water fonts will continue to remain empty, for now.
- Music flyers will be distributed for participation in the liturgies (singing with masks on).
- Bulletins and other items will only be distributed at end of Masses.
- Pew barriers and tape, signs, etc. that were previously used to direct the flow of traffic in aisles will be removed.
- The restriction against gatherings before and after Mass is rescinded, with masks on.

Liturgical Considerations

- Liturgical ministries will gradually be reintroduced in the next few months.
- Congregational singing is once again allowed, but masks need to remain on during singing and throughout the liturgy.
- The Offertory collection will still be restricted for now. However, there will be receptacles to deposit collection offerings and envelopes at the doors of the church.
- There will be no offertory (presentation of the gifts) for the foreseeable future.
- The Sign of peace can be announced and reinstated but only to be exchanged without touching.
- Distribution of Holy Communion will continue as we have during the pandemic: Communicants (with mask on) will receive the consecrated host in their hand, step to the side, lower mask, consume the host, replace the mask, and return to the pew.
- Communion on the tongue is discouraged for the sake of the health of others. Those who receive in this manner will receive only after everyone else has received.
- There will be no distribution of the Precious Blood for now.

Frankly, I am rather perplexed and concerned about the hasty and sudden decision of our Bishops in Connecticut. I have been very proud of our gradual steps to reopening and concern for safety and good health over the past several months. I am concerned that not enough people have been vaccinated to make this a perfect time to fully reopen. Those who have been vaccinated have experienced the benefits of greater mobility in social settings, including church. These vaccinated and otherwise healthy individuals would appear to have little reason not to return to Mass. Because the bishops decided to make this a public statement, my hands are tied, and I surrender to their decision. I leave the decision for your return to your personal decision-making and pray that your decision is one of prudence, good conscience and care for your well-being and the well-being of our brothers and sisters.

My prayers and blessings!

Fr. George Couturier
Pastor, Saint Josephine Bakhita Parish