

Church of the Nativity

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May 26, 2020

Dear Parishioner(s),

Great news: we are allowed to reopen for public worship on Pentecost! Beginning on Saturday, May 30th, we will have Mass at 4:15pm, then again on Sunday, May 31st at 6:30am and 9:30am.

I'll discuss our plan for returning to public worship, but first I wanted to mention the parking lot. You'll notice that it is re-striped and there are more handicap spots. I had originally wanted to put SAT-SUN on the new spots so people knew they were only for the weekend liturgies, but the painters talked me out of it saying it wasn't easily understandable. So, I'll just tell all of you, the handicap spots that we have are meant to be "handicap only" when there are liturgies going on, weekends or funerals mainly. It's not like they are punishable by fines or anything anyway (they would have to be accompanied by a vertical sign in order to be legal), it is just a courtesy thing for those who have difficulty walking, **so use common sense** and don't give me (or anyone else who parks there in the non-busy times) a hard time when I'm parked in one. Also, we renewed the "NO PARKING" near the office and the church and we are very serious about that - if anything is a risk it is this because that is where emergency personnel would need to park.

Second, many people are anxious about returning to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. At this time we do not believe it is prudent to use the confessionals, so I will offer to hear confessions at the normal times, in the cry room, social distanced, face-to-face only.

What follows is the Archdiocese Guidelines for public celebration in **bold** and my comments intermixed in *italics*.

Re-opening of churches in the Archdiocese of Dubuque for the public celebration of Holy Mass and Sacraments

Until further notice, Catholics in the Archdiocese of Dubuque are dispensed from celebrating Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, and from their Easter duty for 2020. Receiving Holy Communion when gathered for Holy Mass with the holy community is an important practice of our holy Catholic Faith. However, charity is the supreme rule, which inspires devotion to the common good, which inspires the following provisions. Your patience and cooperation are most appreciated.

Please stay safe at home and do not come to Mass (this includes clergy) if you...

- **Are sick, or have recently been sick, or have an underlying medical condition**
- **Are frail due to advanced age**
- **Are nervous about contracting COVID-19**
- **Live with and/or care for someone sick, elderly, at risk, or with COVID-19**
- **Work at or regularly visit high-risk situations, where there are COVID-19 cases**

Even if Mass is being offered in parishes, the above-mentioned folks should stay home, either to protect themselves or others from contagion.

As I have said before, we are our own best healthcare advocate. We should protect ourselves first and foremost because we cannot control what anyone else chooses to do. The Archbishop has made it clear that it is not an obligation to go to Mass at this time.

Until further notice, parishes should take safety measures to prevent contagion:

1) People should avoid mingling before/after gathering in church, and parishes should not host crowd activities, or events like funeral meals and wedding receptions.

This is difficult for me because I like to mingle and to talk to everyone. So I guess this means no coffee and donuts for a while either.

2) Social distancing must be observed, that is, people are expected to keep their distance, about 6 feet apart, though people in the same household may be closer together. This will result in fewer people being allowed to congregate in church for Sunday Mass. Again, until further notice, Catholics here are dispensed from the Sunday obligation. The saintly desire to receive the Eucharist can be satisfied at a weekday Mass.

Back in September, I asked the ushers to count how many people were in attendance at each weekend Mass, so we actually have very good data for the six months prior. At the 4:15pm Mass we average 266 people, at 6:30am it's 216 people, and 9:30am has 277 people. Nativity is the biggest church spatially in the Archdiocese, with a capacity of over 1,000, so we are well equipped for social distancing. We have "roped off" every other pew with blue painter's tape, so realistically there should be no problem getting everyone in. If we stager in pews as much as possible, it should not be a problem. Weekday Masses average 75-100 people, so those should be fine as well. Please just try to space families and households as is appropriate.

3) Whenever possible, physical contact should be avoided: when greeting people before or after Mass; passing a collection basket; bringing up bread, wine and the collection in a procession; at the Our Father; at the Sign of Peace; in the Communion line, if people ask for a blessing, or when distributing the Host in the hand.

We will respect these and for now I will not say "Let us offer each other a sign of peace."

4) Holy water fonts and baptismal pools should be emptied or covered.

Already done. But if you want Holy Water for your house, there is a full font in the Adoration Room and you are welcome to bring in a small bottle or jar and fill it, just be sure you sanitize your hands before and after!

5) Missalettes, hymnals, and other printed materials should be removed from the pews.

*The Breaking Bread hymnal stands have been moved to the Altar Server Sacristy. We will print the relevant things for Mass inside the Bulletin, such as the entrance and communion antiphon, and a snippet or two of the readings, so **please grab one on your way in!***

6) The number of liturgical ministers – Deacons, Communion Ministers, Lectors, Altar Servers, Cantor and Choir – should be kept to a minimum, or dispensed with altogether.

We will have only priests and deacons distribute communion. Without music, Mass will be a lot faster, and we believe it will be safer to only have two people distribute. The communion flow will be slightly different to facilitate social distancing and will be directed by the Ushers. We will have only one Lector and they will do all the first reading, psalm, and second reading and the antiphons. We will not have Altar Servers at all. We will not have a Cantor because there will not be singing. When singing, we project a lot more and it is more risky than communion according to doctors. We will have Greeters to open doors and limit the number of touches.

7) Only the Host will be offered at Communion time, and not the cup. Receiving the Host on the tongue is discouraged, for sanitary reasons. Communion Ministers may wear a mask to distribute the Host, but not gloves, and they should sanitize their hands before/after distribution.

Receiving on the tongue is discouraged, but it is not mandated against because only Rome could do that. What I would encourage is if you want to receive on the tongue, come to my line. If I touch your tongue, which is rare, I will stop the line, sanitize my hands, and then resume. I intend to wear a mask when distributing and so will the priest or the deacon who is distributing with me. Beforehand, please consider how you will receive communion so that Jesus in the Eucharist does not touch your mask.

8) Parishioners may be asked to help with sanitizing commonly touched surfaces in the church building (including bathrooms) before/after each celebration.

Just as we have ministry schedules for Lectors, we need to create a new ministry schedule for people to clean the church. I'm sure there are special graces for those willing to clean the bathrooms! If there were any reason to not have the public Mass again, this would be it, so please, call the office and volunteer for this new ministry. Let Helen know your Mass time and

we will start contacting you for help with this important function. We are looking for 4-6 people after every Mass and we will rotate them, so many people on "Clean-up Duty" will make it better for everyone. This includes after 6:30 daily Mass also (coming back/in later is an option).

Other recommended, general safety measures are: wash your hands; don't touch your face; cough into your elbow; and wear a mask.

I am not sure how many people will actually come back to Mass right away, but if you are wondering if we have enough Hand Sanitizer for everyone, the answer is no, not at the moment. We do have plenty for myself and the other ministers, but not for everyone so please bring your own, along with your own mask.

*These last few things are difficult. They are not required, so, think about how you will react if you see someone touch their face? How will you feel if someone coughs or worse, sneezes, unprotected? How will you feel if they forgot their mask? If this makes you anxious or worried, you might be better off not to attend. **The point of Mass is to pray and worship our God, not to look around at whatever people are or are not doing.** I, especially, want to focus on celebrating and praying the Mass, not policing everyone.*

Everyone is doing what they can to survive right now. This is not the time to judge each other, but rather to get back to worship in some sense of normalcy, knowing it is not normal. We have missed the community; we have missed receiving Jesus in the Eucharist; we have missed worshipping God in the manner which He prefers... it will be great to be back together even if it is somewhat limited in a "new normal."

Some of my brother priests are not opening up this weekend in order to "get everything right." Let's be honest, for three months this has been a moving target! We aren't going to get everything right, but we are going to do our best and re-evaluate every week, adjusting as we go along. Please use common sense and a large dose of charity and this return to worship will go smoothly.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Andy

Fr. Andy Upah

Pastor