

Update on Returning to Church

Our Bishop recently lifted the Dispensation from Obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation beginning the weekend of September 26-27. There are reasons many are still dispensed. If you fit into one of these categories, you should not feel obligated to attend Mass – you have a valid dispensation. Others who do not necessarily fit into one of the categories may also have a just cause and be dispensed. If you have questions, contact Father John.

Here are some questions you may have and a response:

Will there be enough room for us to safely distance if more people now come to Mass? Yes, the largest crowd we have had for a Sunday Mass is 185. We average between 140-180 for each of the weekend Masses. The 10:30 Mass tends to have the smallest crowd and 8:30 the largest. This is below our 25% capacity or 250 people. Most of the time we are in the range of 100-140. We are making some adjustments with regard to where people will be allowed to sit while still having open only every other pew. We will also add some chairs in places where we believe people can sit and be safely distanced. This will continue to be carefully monitored and adjustments made as necessary to maintain everyone's safety.

We people be turned away or will we need to register in advance for Mass? At this time no, as we believe with the number of people who need to continue to remain at home will allow us to stay under our adjusted capacity. We will likely require registering for Mass at Christmas.

The Governor's Mask Mandate is set to expire at the end of the month. Will we still wear masks at church? It is understood that there is significant debate about the wearing of masks. However out of a spirit of Christian charity it is hoped all would continue to wear a mask. We have been blessed and locally have not seen a significant outbreak in a church. However there are churches locally who have had to inform their congregation that someone in attendance tested positive. Wearing a mask will help people who have not been in church for several months feel more at ease with returning. It will also allow us to bring back some congregational singing if we wear masks.

Can we start singing more or at least start hearing the Mass parts sung again? Singing does seem to be one of the most significant ways the coronavirus is transmitted. If we continue to wear masks our plan is to start singing more and encouraging congregational singing in the month of October. We will continue to err on the side of caution as no one wants to see an outbreak that would lead to our having to cancel Mass. It is important to remember: at least we once again are having the public celebration of Mass. There are still congregations that have elected to remain closed to onsite indoor services. If we are smart we can do this.

Will we go back to exchanging a sign of peace, having altar servers, etc? No, not in the immediate future. We want to take this slow. Our plans have been carefully thought through and have worked thus far.

Could I come to daily Mass and fulfill my Sunday obligation? If you are not attending a Sunday Mass, you should continue to keep holy the Lord's Day by watching Mass on TV or our livestream,

reading the scriptures, and through private prayer such as the Rosary or Stations of the Cross. An excellent option if you are attending a Sunday Mass is to attend a daily Mass. They are held in the main church, and with a much smaller crowd it is easy to social distance. While it does not fulfill the Sunday obligation, it is a good way to at least participate in Mass in person and receive the Eucharist. We are also starting to bring the Eucharist to people at home, using safe guidelines and not entering the home. Watch for more information about this for those who need to continue to shelter at home.