

OUR NEXT STEPS IN RESTORING PARISH LIFE AT ST. LAWRENCE

May 30, 2021

Dear Fellow Parishioners & Friends,

Happy return to Ordinary Time! Though our lives are still far from “ordinary,” I thought it an important moment to communicate where things stand as our parish and the larger community take positive steps forward at this stage in the COVID-19 pandemic.

We’ve been hearing *very encouraging news* of late, as the CDC, New York State, and other agencies announce dramatic changes in policy intended to return our lives to something approaching what we knew before. Our Diocese has also reconfigured the many protocols in place since March, 2020. Having examined these recommendations thoughtfully, the parish staff and I want to make you aware of the following **interim guidelines** to help guide parish life forward. As I remarked in my bulletin column for Pentecost Sunday, this is a hopeful time! But it’s also one in which charity demands we **not** set aside our concern for those who are vulnerable, particularly the elderly, sick, or otherwise compromised. A number of parishioners have remarked that the reason they feel comfortable joining us for Mass in person at St. Lawrence is precisely because they believe they’re in a safe environment. I don’t intend to undo that hard-won sense of safety, even as we relax many of the past year’s restrictions.

WHAT REMAINS THE SAME (MOSTLY)?

1. Dispensation from Attending Mass*** - The dispensation from the normal obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days remains in effect, **but only until the weekend of August 14-15th, 2021 (the Feast of the Assumption)**. Those who are in good health and not struggling with a compromising health condition are encouraged to return to Mass in-person at the earliest opportunity, but **the obligation to attend for all Catholics in our Diocese resumes as of August 14th & 15th**.

2. Our YouTube Recording - Almost entirely through the dedication, sacrifice, and skill of our Music Director, Joe Mankowski, we have been able to post a weekly recording of the Saturday 5:00 PM Mass for well over a year. This recording will continue for the coming few months, **until Mass attendance is once again obligatory in mid-August**. Those who are unable to join us for Mass in-person now, are encouraged to watch from home, by going to our YouTube channel online. You’ll find a link toward

the bottom of our website's homepage, or go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbgl2Ij175vhmhzKsBoPBgQ>

3. Masks / Facial Coverings - For the time being, I am *encouraging* those entering the church or other parish buildings to **continue to wear a mask or cloth facial covering** for the brief time you are with us. An epidemiologist might have a different point of view. But I think it would be a mistake for us to set the masks aside too abruptly, when (a) we are gathering in sizable numbers in a large but enclosed space; (b) we are relaxing social distancing guidelines (see below); and (c) many are not yet fully vaccinated. Children under the age of 2, and those with difficulty breathing, are not obliged to wear facial coverings. And parents may wish to decide if their young children ought to be masked, since risk to and from young children is very low. We continue to have a responsibility to and for our neighbor, even if we stand on different sides of this surprisingly contentious issue. **Let us love one another**—even if it means a measure of inconvenience or sacrifice for now.

4. Reminder to the Sick & Elderly - Those who are sick or vulnerable due to age or other health conditions are still encouraged to **remain at home**, and if possible continue to view the Mass on our YouTube channel, on the Catholic Faith Network (Optimum channel 29), or online.

5. Liturgical Modifications - A number of the protocols put in place over a year ago (for example, no reception of the Precious Blood from the chalice) will remain unchanged for now. Please see more examples below.

6. Distribution of Holy Communion - Please see pp. 5-7.

SO WHAT'S CHANGING?

1. Social Distancing - *Don't get the wrong idea!* We are not scrapping the important encouragement to maintain a safe and reasonable distance from people who are not part of your own family. We are, however, relaxing the protocols you've patiently observed in church for a year now:

A. **Colored tape** will be used only in the center of the church, where the pews are narrowest. Skipping a pew between those that are occupied—only in the center of the church—continues to make sense for now.

B. The familiar **signs** indicating where couples, individuals, or families should sit will be removed. Parishioners should use their own good judgment in seating

themselves. The center sections are no longer reserved for individuals and couples.

C. The **side sections** of the church, where the pews are much longer, are all open for use. However, signs will be posted at each end of these long pews, indicating **which end of the pew should be used**. The idea is not to sit directly behind the person(s) in front of you, but to alternate the seating from side to side.

D. The seats around the perimeter of the church will remain in place.

E. Please make use of the seats **in the front of the church** where the choir would normally be, and on the opposite side by the Bethany Center doors.

Since we now have the freedom to use 100% of the building's capacity, we want to allow as many parishioners to attend as wish to, but *without crowding anyone*.

2. Processions - The entrance and recessional processions will resume, with the lector, deacon, and priest wearing masks while moving through the congregation. (The offertory procession will not take place as yet, since it involves having multiple people handling the gifts, etc.

3. Funerals, Weddings, and Baptisms - The celebration of funerals and weddings is no longer limited in attendance. Families coming for the baptism of an infant are asked to limit their attendance to no more than 20 people. Various protocols to ensure particular safety at baptisms will remain in place.

4. Parish Meetings "on Campus" - Though not all parish activities are resuming yet (e.g., CYO), other groups and organizations now have permission to meet, primarily in the school gym, using recently developed interim guidelines. Group leaders should be sure to contact the rectory for copies of those guidelines, and scheduling options.

WHAT WILL WE DELAY FOR A WHILE LONGER?

1. Altar Servers - A good number of our servers (whom we miss seeing!) are not yet eligible for vaccination—if their parents choose to have them vaccinated—and all the servers will need a "refresher" before returning to their ministry.

2. Choir - The choir normally does not sing during the summer months. They will hopefully make their long-awaited return in the fall.

3. Confessionals - We will continue our current practice of hearing confessions in the Bethany Center, on Saturdays from 3:45 to 4:45 PM. The confessionals have low ceilings and afford relatively little space.

4. Holy Water - The baptismal font and the holy water receptacles will remain empty. Holy water may be taken from the large canister in the rear of the church to fill holy water bottles, etc.

5. Hymnals/Worship Aids - Many are eager to join the cantor in singing, and touching a hymnal does not seem to pose a significant danger of viral transmission. However, the *practice* of singing by the whole congregation should probably not be encouraged as yet. Parishioners can feel free to bring their own worship aid, however, taking it with them as they leave.

6. Presentation of the Gifts - See "Processions," above.

7. Reception of the Precious Blood - This will not take place until further notice.

8. Sign of Peace - One may certainly shake hands, hug, kiss members of one's own household, or wave to those around you, but physical contact with those not in your household should be avoided.

AND WHAT ELSE?

1. Parish Offices - The offices have been open since June of last year, and operating with regular office hours. Please note the following:

A. All those visiting any of the offices are *still encouraged* to wear a mask or cloth facial covering, and should be observant of reasonable social distancing.

B. Those visiting one of the offices for more than a brief moment are asked to sign a log-book indicating name, phone number, and assurance that no viral symptoms are being experienced.

C. For the most part, clients visiting the Parish Outreach Office are met and cared for at the office door.

2. Faith Formation - The Office of Faith Formation has navigated this past year remarkably, utilizing an entirely online approach. The sacrament of First Holy Communion has already been administered to 100 of our children, and an even larger group of our young people will be confirmed in early June.

Careful thought is being given to the shape the program will have in the Fall, 2021, and more information will be forthcoming. We thank ALL our Faith Formation families and catechists for their patience, flexibility, and dedication!

It is a pleasure to see our community coming together in greater numbers, especially around the Lord's altar. Our parish has displayed remarkable patience and grace throughout these many months; **please continue to be patient with us**, as we work to reassemble the pieces of our faith and worship life. Let's continue to hold one another in prayer! St. Lawrence, pray for us!

Father Brian

* * *

THE DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

*Remarkable progress is being made against the COVID-19 virus, but it has certainly not disappeared from our lives. Therefore, the important protocols to which we've been adhering since June, 2020 **remain in effect** when it comes to receiving the Eucharist. As always, we are very grateful for your cooperation and patience.*

A. What to Expect as the Communion Rite Begins

1. During the "Lamb of God," the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMs) walk forward into the sanctuary, wearing their masks, and immediately sanitize their hands. They take their usual positions behind the priest (and deacon).
2. Having recited or sung the "Lamb of God," the priest consumes the Eucharist in the usual way. Having done so, he puts on a mask or cloth facial covering, and sanitizes his hands. If need be, he may go to the tabernacle to retrieve the Blessed Sacrament.
3. The priest gives vessels of consecrated hosts to the EMs. The EMs do not receive the Eucharist themselves at this time, but will wait until after having distributed it to the congregation.
3. The priest (deacon and other ministers) step down from the altar to their Communion stations. Next to each minister is a small table, on which have been placed a corporal, and hand sanitizer.

B. Distribution of Holy Communion

1. Those coming forward on the Communion line should continue to maintain a reasonable social distance between themselves, and parishioners not belonging to their household.
2. Those receiving Communion should only remove or lower their facial coverings immediately before receiving the host.
3. The priest, deacon or other ministers may not wear gloves while distributing Holy Communion, nor may parishioners wear gloves as they receive.
4. Those receiving Communion do so in the normal way. If the minister senses that his or her fingers have made contact with a person's hand or mouth, he/she pauses, sets down the ciborium on the corporal, and uses hand sanitizer. He/she may repeat this process as often as necessary until all have received. It is not necessary, however, for him/her to use hand sanitizer **between each communicant**, unless he/she makes physical contact.
- 5.** In an attempt to minimize physical contact, those receiving Communion should extend their hands in the proper way, and as "flatly" as possible. **Cupping one's hands or curling one's fingers is not helpful.** Those receiving on the tongue (see Section C), should open their mouth wide and extend their tongue fully.
6. When distribution is finished, the priest and other ministers return to the altar, where the EMs receive the Eucharist.
7. Having removed his mask, the priest continues with the closing prayer and final blessing.

C. Communion on the Tongue

1. Although one may receive either in the hand or on the tongue, the weight of medical opinion sought by the Diocese is that **it is safer to receive in the hand.** Therefore, those who normally receive on the tongue are *strongly urged to receive in the hand* at this time. That being said, no one will be denied being able to receive on the tongue if they choose.
2. Because reception on the tongue increases the likelihood of physical contact between the priest or minister and the communicant:
 - (a) It is recommended that the minister use hand sanitizer after **each** communicant who receives on the tongue;

(b) Those receiving on the tongue should wait to come forward **at the end of the Communion line**, since the priest will be needing to sanitize his hands between each individual; and

(c) Those receiving on the tongue receive from **the priest only**, so that our Extraordinary Ministers are not placed in an uncomfortable position.