

WELCOMING OUR PARISHIONERS BACK TO CHURCH

Updated November 11, 2020

Dear Friends,

Though the number of parishioners attending Mass on the weekends continues to be modest, we are delighted to see familiar faces in our pews once again, and to be able to share the treasure of the Eucharist in person.

Currently, our attendance is limited to **33% of the church's total seating capacity**. Our church holds roughly 700 people, so 33% of that number is 231. But the *added requirement* of social distancing by 6 feet actually leaves us with **far fewer than 231 available seats**. For the number of seats to change in a significant way, the 6 foot social distancing requirement would have to be reduced (which isn't likely at this time). *In any case, we've been fortunate to have ample seating at all the Masses thus far.*

WEEKDAY MASS SCHEDULE: *For the time being, and subject to change:*
Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays at 9:00 AM

WEEKEND MASS SCHEDULE: *For the time being, and subject to change:*

- **Saturdays at 5:00 PM**
- **Sundays at 9:00 AM and 11:00 AM** (note: there is no 7:30 AM Mass for now)

PLEASE BE ESPECIALLY MINDFUL OF THE FOLLOWING:

1. Those who are sick or vulnerable due to age or other health conditions are **encouraged to remain at home**, and if possible continue to view the Mass on our YouTube channel (see the link on our homepage), on TV, or online. The safety of our parish family from youngest to oldest needs to be a paramount concern. *The coronavirus is still a significant threat*, and our behavior needs to be reflective of that.
2. Bishop Barres has suspended the normal obligation to attend Sunday Mass until further notice. There is no obligation to attend Mass, and one should not feel guilty if unable to do so, especially because of age or illness.

3. For more information of precisely HOW Communion is being distributed at St. Lawrence, please read the link on the homepage of this website: **DIRECTIONS FOR RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION.**

NOW, TO GET MORE PRACTICAL:

Please familiarize yourself with the following if you attend Mass in person. We want you to feel as comfortable and secure as possible, with few surprises!

1. Since we are only permitted to have a limited number of people in the building at one time, **the church looks different:** you will see colored tape blocking off many pews, and signs marking spots where you are welcome to sit. Our goal is to be conscientious in maintaining proper social distancing.
2. We have subdivided the church into sections: for single individuals, for couples, and for families. Obviously, we wish to have couples and families sit together. Those not living in the same household must remain 6 feet apart, observing social distancing. **Please sit exactly where the signs indicate; if you do not, you may not be fully 6 feet distant from someone behind or in front of you.**
3. Please follow the guidance of our ushers, who are familiar with the seating plan and are eager to help you.
4. Please be flexible in sitting where space allows, making full 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.
5. You may find the church closed prior to Mass for proper cleaning and sanitizing.
6. **Masks or cloth facial coverings must be worn by all present, covering both nose and mouth, and for the entirety of the liturgy.** They will not be distributed, so BE SURE to bring your own with you. You will notice, however, that the priest, the lector and the cantor do not wear a mask during the liturgy (as per Diocesan directives). Children under the age of 2, and those with difficulty breathing are not obliged to wear facial coverings.
7. **All parishioners are asked to thoroughly wash their hands before and after Mass.** The priest and ministers will do the same. You may wish to bring a small container of hand sanitizer with you as well.

8. For the time being, the liturgy itself has been simplified in a number of ways:
 - a. There will be no altar servers.
 - b. The entrance procession and recessional will be abbreviated.
 - c. There will be no presentation of the gifts.
 - d. There will be no exchange of the Sign of Peace.

9. After the conclusion of Mass, parishioners may remain in their pews for thanksgiving, but all are asked to leave the church in a timely way to allow for proper cleaning of the pews, restrooms, doors, etc. Though it's so natural to want to chat with family and friends, **please do not congregate inside the building at this time.**

OTHER POINTS OF INFORMATION:

1. Various materials have been removed from the church to lessen the possibility of infection: hymnals, prayer cards, children's Mass booklets, missalettes, and random prayer sheets. Feel free to bring your own worship aid, and be sure to take it with you when you leave.

2. 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 bottles, etc.

AND WHAT ELSE?

1. **CONFESSION** – The sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) is available **each Saturday, from 1:00 to 2:00 PM in the Bethany Center.** Parishioners are also free to call the rectory for an appointment.

2. **PARISH OFFICES**
 - All those visiting any of the offices **MUST** wear a mask or cloth facial covering, and must be observant of social distancing. We have reconfigured the main office so that more space is provided. Visitors may need to wait outside or in their cars so that crowding is avoided.
 - 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.

3. **FUNERALS, WEDDINGS, & BAPTISMS** – The celebration of baptisms, weddings, and funerals is **limited in attendance to 125 persons** (for funerals and weddings) and no more than **20 per family** for baptisms.

It is a genuine pleasure to see our faith community coming together once again, especially around the Lord's altar, after such a long and stressful period of physical separation. The threat of the COVID-19 virus is still alarmingly real, however, and we need to remain vigilant and focused in observing health and safety directives as carefully as we can. Our community has displayed remarkable patience and grace throughout these many months; PLEASE continue to be patient with us here at the parish, as we gradually reassemble the pieces of our faith and worship life. Let's continue to hold one another in prayer.

My prayers and fond wishes go out to all of you!

Father Brian