St. Mary the Virgin Mother
Roman Catholic Church

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May 7, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

Greetings to you in our Lord Jesus Christ and His Immaculate Mother,

We are all grateful that the Bishop on May 1st directed all pastors to begin implementing a gradual and phased in resumption of Mass that will lift restrictions gradually keeping the safety of parishioners and ministers at the forefront. The Bishop also emphasized that it is important that the faithful are aware that the dispensation of attending Mass still remains in effect until further notice. There is no mandate to return and is at the discretion of the parishioner.

Before elaborating on a 3 phase approach that I will implement after having consulted with staff, several parishioners along with civil authorities, I believe it's important you are made aware of some of the directives and restrictions mandated upon us by Diocesan authorities.

They are as follows:

Parishioners and all church staff should be reminded if they are considered high risk and more vulnerable to the virus they should consider not attending Mass in the church and continue to participate in virtual or televised Mass.

The number of people allowed in the church must be only 25% of its capacity. This means a total of 56 parishioners in the church, 23 on each side, sitting at designated locations to assure 6ft separation except for families who can sit together.

After each Mass the church will have to be sanitized following CDC guidelines cleansing all the touch surfaces in the church including rest rooms which we are to use only if necessary.

People are advised to wear a mask.

All those who feel at risk, are fearful, are over 65 with respiratory issues or are immunocompromised should stay at home and participate through in virtual or televised services.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation will not be available but the Bishop has authorized the giving of General Absolution for those in attendance.

There will be no social gatherings before or after services.

There are other restrictions and directives that also must be implemented but these provide an insight of some that have influenced our discernment for the resumption of Masses through the following proposed stages.

Stage 1

The parish will offer only daily week day Masses, as other dioceses are doing such as Dallas, which will be for us Tuesday – Friday at 6pm and Saturday at 9am. There will be no Vigil and Sunday Masses because of the restricted occupancy requirements, the sanitations mandate and the need for personnel to provide the services before and after each Mass. It also will be awkward and difficult to deny entry to parishioners after 56 have entered.

The pews will be marked with seating locations and the side aisles will be marked for safe distancing in 2 procession lines to receive Holy Communion. Only the side aisles will be utilized with two Eucharistic Ministers one on each side with return to pews occurring up the main aisle after reception.

As the Bishop as stated , if parishioners desire to receive Holy Communion but are nervous and feel vulnerable at the eventual resumption of Sunday Masses, they should be encouraged to attend a week day Mass.

Stage 2.

After Pentecost, May 31st, consideration will be given to resuming Sunday services, with the parish hall being spaced off to provide for inevitable over flow of attendees because of continued occupancy restrictions. Mass will be lived streamed into the parish hall.

A Eucharistic Minister will bring Holy Communion to those in attendance.

Stage 3.

When the Diocese gives permission followed by consultation with civil authorities, the church will then return to pre-virus ministry scheduling and services. Also, I am aware that there will be questions to be answered. Please feel free to call the office with any of your concerns.

In closing,

I want to thank you for your prayers, patience and understanding during these difficult times. Furthermore, your generosity through your continued financial support for your parish is deeply appreciated and I know the Lord will bless you for providing for our common spiritual home and His dwelling place. I am certain when you return to church you will experience a new springtime of joy the fruit of your longing to experience the sacred intimacy of Holy Communion. And as you receive Jesus you will hear His voice in your heart saying: My child I have never left you. I have carried you through these difficult times and my Divine embrace will always be your strength and consolation.

Yours in the Peace of our Risen Lord,

Fr. Dan +