



Holy Redeemer Parish

My dear friends!

By now, I'm sure you've heard that the Bishop has set a date for public Mass to resume in the Diocese on **May 29th**. As of Friday, we will resume having Mass here at Holy Redeemer, but it will look different than when we last gathered. Some of the most significant changes to Mass will be highlighted in this letter. I ask that you read it carefully and abide by the recommendations here. They are for the safety of everyone walking through our doors. Every parish in the diocese has the same basic guidelines.

The first point to make is that **the Bishop has lifted the obligation to attend Sunday Mass through June 30th**, so if you're uncomfortable attending public Mass at this time, you can still worship from home with a televised or streamed Mass. Those who feel comfortable to return to public Mass need not necessarily do so on Sunday. In fact, it might be preferable to come for daily Mass during the week, if schedules are flexible. Though there is a real difference between the solemnity of Sunday Mass and Mass for the rest of the week, some of us may be called upon to make some adjustments. And the Mass is still Mass, after all!

This brings me to the second point I wanted to discuss. While our quarantine/stay-at-home order ends on May 29th, the reality of COVID-19 does not. This applies to all of us, but especially those who are particularly vulnerable to a more severe reaction to contracting the virus due to age or preexisting conditions. Though it's a difficult, nearly impossible decision to make, it **might be better for those deemed vulnerable to refrain from attending public Mass for a few more weeks**. Again, it's not strictly obligatory to go to Mass, so those 60 and older and those with preexisting conditions, especially asthma, heart disease, and some of the others highlighted by health officials should really consider not coming to Mass just yet. The exercise of the virtue of prudence, rightly discerned, does not come from a place of fear, but of the humble and rational acknowledgement of circumstance.

There will also be a number of safety precautions we are strongly encouraging everyone to abide by. I cannot stress enough that these precautions are not intended to cause more concern or fear, nor do they arise from political motivations. They are the result of prudent consideration of the facts at hand concerning COVID-19 and its transmission.

1. **Sign Ups for Mass:** Per regulations from the diocese, each church is permitted to have no more than 25% total occupancy for any given purpose, Mass, funeral, wedding, etc. For us, this means 160 people. Given that the average Sunday Mass probably has quite a bit more than this normally, it will all require some creativity and sacrifice on everyone's part, so that everyone who wants to attend Mass may do so. For that reason we will be using a digital sign-up service, Pastors Toolbox- Save A Seat, to facilitate this. An email will be sent out via Flocknote with the address to the online service. The URL is <https://www.pastorstoolbox.com/save-a-seat/60113baa-ddc2-522c-8906-9498d67a3f50>. For those without Internet access, please contact the Parish Office at 616-669-9220. As difficult as this request is, I would ask that, for the time being, *families (of any size) limit themselves to one (1) Mass per week.*
2. **Social distancing in pews:** Ushers will be available to assist people to their seats. Half of the pews are roped off, and will not be in use. The pews that will be used to seat people have markings to indicate six (6) foot social distancing space. Smaller families will be asked to sit towards the front, and larger families in the back. Please **not to use the kneelers at all.** We'll remain standing or seated for the duration of the Eucharistic Prayer between the Sanctus and Great Amen, please be seated after you receive Communion.
3. **Masks and other safety equipment:** We ask that everyone who has a mask, please bring it with you, or get one before you come to Mass. This applies to children older than age 2. This may be a difficult request for some, but I will merely reply with the words of the Lord: no greater love than this, that to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:13) I encourage you all to bring your own hand sanitizer. *I would pose these questions to those who intend not to wear a mask to prayerfully ask themselves: is it charitable to go without one, especially if it evokes fear in other parishioners?*
4. **Bathrooms:** Of particular importance are the restroom facilities. They are nearly impossible to keep sanitized, so we are asking that you refrain from using them if at all possible. However, if the necessity arises, we will try to keep them stocked with sanitizing wipes. Also, only the bathrooms in the hallway between Shepherd's Hall and the narthex will be open for use. The drinking fountain will be turned off and covered, as well.
5. **Communion:** The movement of people will be very complicated, since we'll try and maintain distance as much as possible. The long and short of it is that people will be dismissed by sections to Communion. It may take a bit longer than normal. (Then again, maybe it won't, since there will be less of us!) I will give instructions at each Mass, as well. Communion will only be offered as the Precious Body (host), not the chalice.
6. **Worship aids:** Instead of using the hymnals, which are a petri dish of germs, we'll use worship aids for the music during Mass. Kindly dispose of them in the containers provided in the narthex, or bring them home.

Many of these guidelines will be repeated in the few minutes before the start of Mass, and some during Mass itself. Hopefully, all will go well!

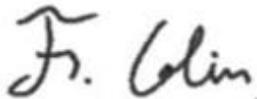
Here are a **few other miscellaneous practices** that will be in place, as well.

- The church and narthex spaces will be sanitized after each Mass.
- We will not have nursery services available, due to the difficulty of keeping things clean. Parents with young children may want to consider continuing to hold back from attending Mass, if possible. It will still be live streamed on Facebook at the regularly scheduled times.
- The Rosary won't be prayed publicly before Mass.
- Doors for Mass will open 20 minutes before Mass, in order to maintain social distancing numbers.
- Only one door will be used for entrance, the southern of the two main doors to church.

In the weeks to come, we will be seeking volunteers to help ensure that we are maintaining social distancing before, during and after Mass. Our primary concern as we come together again is that we keep each other, and ourselves, as safe and secure as we are able. Volunteers will be invaluable in making that goal a reality.

I want to conclude by making a personal appeal: please be patient! Patient with staff and volunteers, and especially patient with each other. Some of these guidelines may seem like overkill, or at least alarmist and unnecessary. Abide by them anyway, for the sake of your neighbors, fellow parishioners, brothers and sisters in Christ. Let's focus on our excitement to be back together, receiving the Lord in Word and Sacrament, sharing in the Eucharistic sacrifice once again! If we have to make some adjustments for the time being, please remember that.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Colin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.