

22 May 2020

Dear Parishioners,

"We must move slowly, cautiously, and with a great deal of concern to protect the well-being, safety, and health of our people." ~Bishop Bambera

This week is an important step for Susquehanna and Wayne Counties as they are now in the "Yellow Phase" of opening, but we must keep Bishop Bambera's important message as our guiding benchmark. I know we would all like to fill our pews this weekend, but our bishop is urging all parishes in the Yellow Phase to have a slow return to "normal." So first of all, I would like to reiterate that the bishop reminds us that the **dispensation to attend Mass is still in place**. The elderly or those in the high-risk category, which includes those over the age of 65 and those with underlying medical conditions, have been strongly encouraged not to attend. Secondly, there are still many parishes that will continue to offer online Masses. While it is true that some parishes are gradually re-opening and resuming the public celebration of Mass, it is also misleading. The reality of the situation is that people are still getting sick from COVID-19, and some of them will die. We must therefore hold all of our parishioners to a strict adherence to the procedures listed below.

I will try to clarify the procedures and regulations that I am required to follow. They will be strictly enforced for those attending any Mass. They are non-negotiable, whether we agree with them or think it is an overreaction.

- If you do not follow our procedures, you will not be allowed to enter and/or will be asked to leave the Mass. They are in place to keep you and me safe.
- Masses will return to our regular Mass schedule before the quarantine started. There will be a change to the individual prayer hours, which will be announced at a later time.
- 25 people is the maximum allowed attendance, and that includes me, any liturgical staff, and volunteers. That already brings us down to 22 or 21 available openings.
- Everyone must provide their own mask and wear it at all times. When it is your turn to receive Communion, take the host, lift your mask, and place it in your mouth.
- Please stay home if you are sick. If you seem ill or have symptoms of COVID-19, you will not be allowed to enter for Mass.
- Everyone is required to keep social-distance spacing while moving or while seated.
- Entrance will be through one door. For entrance, please keep social-distance spacing when outside. After you enter you must sanitize your hands.
- Hymnals and bulletins will not be available at the churches. The bulletin is on our website: www.apskdp.org.
- Sign of peace and the collection process are omitted. A receptacle for the offertory/envelopes will be placed in a stationary location.
- For now, music will be omitted, and we will try to keep the liturgical staff to a minimum. Altar servers are not to be used during this time.
- **Communion will be at the end of mass. Social-distance spacing should be maintained while walking to the Priest/Deacon or Eucharistic minister. You will not be able to return to your pew. You must depart the Church after receiving the Holy Sacrament.**

- It is highly recommended to receive communion on the hand for the safety of yourself and the Priest/Deacon or Eucharistic minister distributing communion.
- Exit will be through one door. You may not socialize or gather after mass in the church or in the parking lot.
- Before and after every Mass, the church must be cleaned and sanitized
- Please minimize any items you bring into the church, and limit using our restrooms, for your safety. Any items left behind are subject to disposal.

As you can see, we are going to need many volunteers to make sure our procedures are implemented correctly at each mass at all our churches. If you can help, please call the office at 570-785-3838 or email us at apskdp@nep.net. We need to know what you're willing and able to do, including possibly donating supplies, which church, and availability at the Masses. Anyone that volunteers must not be elderly or in the high-risk category of physical health conditions.

We are trying not to create hurt feelings, division or anger at a time when we are all already frustrated. However, it should not be expected to attend Mass on a daily or even a regular basis. We are developing a reservation system to ensure a fair and equitable arrangement of mass attendance. As long as the current restriction of no more than 25 attendees at a Mass is in place, then each individual must call the office to attend a Mass, and also provide each person's name if this is a family. You then must receive confirmation from the office that you are able to attend and on the list for Mass that day. The office will keep a record of all Mass attendance so that we can equally share the possibility to attend a Mass to all our parishioners. Verification of the reservation made will also take place at the door before entry. **No individual should expect to show up and be able to enter the church for Mass without a reservation.** In utilizing this system, we also will be able to keep an accurate contact tracing record to notify people in case any of the attendees become sick. You may begin calling to RSVP for masses on Thursday, May 28th.

Please understand that we expect the office will have a high volume of phone calls at any given time. If you reach the voicemail, please leave a message, and it will be returned as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, the fact is that this virus is not fading away, and the timeline for a return to normal life is still uncertain. We have no precedent for handling public Mass during a pandemic. I ask for your patience, understanding, and prayers for those trying to solve this on the Church level, for me, and for all of us, as we cope with this challenge together. I hope the Lord has strengthened and comforted you during this ordeal, as He has for me.

Sincerely,

Rev. Stephen A. Krawontka
Pastor