

Reflections & guidelines as we prepare to return to public Masses in the Church.

A message from Fr. Jack

It has been many weeks since we discontinued the public celebration of weekend Masses and I know that many are looking forward to our return to Mass this weekend, myself included. While this is great news, it will be challenging and there are several important considerations I would like all to consider as we take this next step. These guidelines are based upon the directives that we have received from the Diocese of Providence in conjunction with the State Board of Health.

While we will return to our regularly scheduled Masses this weekend and on weekdays, it will not look the same for some time. A smooth transition will depend on everyone being patient and cooperative with the process and the requirements. With this in mind, I offer the list of regulations we will be following.

- **Parishioners who are advanced in age** and/or have medical conditions that would make them more vulnerable as well as individuals who, for any reason, are not yet comfortable returning to a large gathering of people, are encouraged to remain at home and, if possible, join us through the Video Masses which will still be available on our parish website www.stbernardnk.org each Sunday morning. **The Bishop continues to dispense everyone in the Diocese from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until further notice. Anyone who is ill or has any symptoms whatsoever must not attend Mass under any circumstances.**
- According to the state restrictions, **our attendance at any Mass will be limited to 150 persons.** In order to control the number of people at each Mass, we ask that you arrive early and make use of the hand sanitizers provided. If we find that we have more than we can accommodate, we will consider other alternatives for the future, like advanced reservations or the addition of one Mass.
- **Due to the sanitizing requirements, restrooms will be available for emergency use only.**
- **Parishioners must maintain a 6-foot social distance between each other and are required to wear a face mask when attending Mass.** Pews will be marked and closed off to facilitate the distancing. Members of the same household will be able to sit together. **No one will be allowed to congregate in the church for conversations before or after Masses.**
- Remember that it is **not necessary to receive Holy Communion at Mass, especially those who might feel uncomfortable** or who feel they might be put at risk by going forward to receive with others. For those who do wish to receive Holy Communion they will be directed to stand in a single line, keeping a distance of 6 feet between themselves and the person in front of them. There will be markers on the floor and there will be only

3 communion stations. Holy Communion will be distributed **in the hand only**, and parishioners should keep their mask on until they put their hand out to receive the sacred host. Before they put out their hands to receive, they would remove their face mask from one ear, receive and consume the host, then put the face mask back on. (we will demonstrate this before Mass begins.) Eucharistic Ministers will be instructed about the proper way to hand sanitize before the begin the distribution of Holy Communion.

- Because we are restricted by wearing face masks, **music will be kept to a minimum** and Missalettes and Hymnals have been removed from the pews so they are not being handled by other people. For the time being will use standard hymns known by everyone.

- **At the end of Mass, departure from the Church will be staggered and the main doors of the Church will be opened** in order to avoid crowding at the doors. Please, be patient as the ushers direct the process and after Mass has ended, **do not congregate in the Church** or in the parking lot.

- After Mass is ended, the commonly used areas, pews, restrooms, etc., will be cleaned and sanitized in preparation for the next Mass.

- **On Monday, June 1st, we will return to our regular schedule.** **Daily Mass** will be offered from Monday – Friday at **8:00 AM** and the same distancing regulations will be in force for daily Masses. **The Parish Office** will be open Monday and Tuesday from 9 AM until 4 PM and on Wednesday until 12 Noon. The Office is closed on Thursday and Friday.

Again, I thank you for your patience and understanding. These are very challenging times, but we will get through it all together. Let us join in prayer that God will continue to bless and guide us as we move forward.

Fr. Jack