

A Statement and Guidelines for Reopening for Public Worship
St. Mary's Catholic Church, El Paso, IL and St. John's Catholic Church, Benson, IL

St. Mary's Church and St. John's Church is committed to the health and safety of parishioners and guests as public worship resumes. While the parish staff and volunteers will take appropriate precautions consistent with the advice of public health authorities and our Diocesan guidelines, parishioners and guests should understand that they assume the risk of contracting Covid-19 anytime they enter a public space since such precautions do not eliminate the risk of infection.

Because of this, Bishop Jenky has continued to dispense all of the faithful of the Diocese of Peoria from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass. To this end, the Bishop recently has written in a letter to the faithful of the Diocese, "those who are vulnerable to infection or simply uncomfortable gathering in large groups should know in these unusual circumstances they are under no obligation to attend Mass. Some might even consider attending a weekday Mass rather than a Sunday congregation. As always, those who are ill should simply stay home."

As St. Mary's and St. John's have received certification to enter Phase II of the Diocesan plan for reopening churches, we will return to our usual weekday and weekend Mass schedule. Weekday Masses at St. Mary's will be on Tuesday evening at 5:30pm and Wednesday through Friday at 7:30am. The Weekend Mass Schedule is as follows: Saturday Evening, St. Mary's at 5:00pm (music), Sunday Morning, St. John's at 8:00am (music) and St. Mary's at 10:00am (NO music). The live streamed Mass will be the 5:00pm Mass at St. Mary's and will continue at least through the summer. Please note that the congregants will not be on camera. The exception is the Lector and the Eucharistic Minister. For those do not feel comfortable coming to the public Masses, we will be offering the opportunity to receive Holy Communion (for both parishes) via the outdoor distribution at St. Mary's from 11:00am to 11:30am every Sunday at least through the summer. Please do not form a line before 10:45am so as to allow the 10am Mass congregants to exit the parking lot.

Confessions are still by appointment. Please email me at frrayson@gmail.com or call the parish office at 527-4555. Eventually we will return to a regular schedule for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The following guidelines will be observed for public worship until further notice:

-----Generally it is expected that all who enter the church will wear a face covering/mask, which is to be worn anytime social distancing cannot be maintained; once seated in the pew you may remove your face covering/mask as the marked seating will provide for proper social distancing; during Holy Communion you are asked to put on your face covering/mask but after you have received Holy Communion you may remove your mask; finally you are asked to wear your face covering/mask when exiting the church. Children under the age of 2, those who have trouble breathing, and those who have a medical condition that would preclude the use of a face covering/mask, **SHOULD NOT WEAR A FACECOVERING/MASK.**

-----Daily Mass protocols will differ slightly from Sunday Mass protocols. For Daily Mass, you are asked to please enter the church from the main entrance. **Please do not enter through the side door** unless limitations in mobility or other health concerns require you to be seated in the first pew. When you arrive through the main entrance, please use the hand sanitizer that is available in the vestibule of the church. After you have sanitized your hands, please seat yourself towards the front of the church. Pews marked with a blue X (every other pew) are NOT to be used so that we can establish proper social distancing. If you wish to sit in the center or rear of the church, please do not sit near the aisle. For the distribution of Holy Communion, I will come to everyone in the pews to give them Holy Communion or a blessing. I as well as any Eucharistic Minister will wear a face covering/mask when distributing Holy Communion. **Please note that Holy Communion must be received in the hand.** After Mass is concluded, we ask those sitting towards the back to exit first, followed by the next row, until every row has exited the church.

-----Sunday Mass differ slightly than the Daily Mass protocols. For Sunday Mass, you are asked to arrive 20-30 minutes before the Mass begins. Please enter the church through the main entrance facing Third Street. **Please do not enter through the side door** unless limitations in mobility or other health concerns require you to be seated in the first pew. When you arrive through the main entrance, please use the hand sanitizer that is available in the vestibule of the church. Afterwards the ushers will ask how many in your family and will seat you accordingly beginning with the front pews. Pews marked with a blue X (every other pew) are NOT to be used so that we can establish proper social distancing. For the distribution of Holy Communion, the assigned Eucharistic Minister and myself will come to you in your pews to distribute Holy Communion or give you a blessing. When we distribute Holy Communion we will be wearing a face covering of some sort. **Please note that Holy Communion must be received in the hand.** After Mass is concluded, please wait for the ushers to dismiss each row. The ushers will begin dismissing from the back pews and will work toward the front pews. Please be patient with the seating and dismissing for weekend Masses. Once we get used to the process, it will eventually go smoothly.

-----Miscellaneous Mass Info: Please note there will be no procession with the offertory gifts, no sign of peace, and no distribution of the Precious Blood. The ushers will not take up the collection in the usual way but there will be a table in back with two baskets for you to place your contribution either enter or exiting the church.

-----The bathroom may be used however, upon entering the bathroom as well as exiting the bathroom, please use the hand sanitizer in the vestibule of the church.

-----The cry room can be used but is restricted to only ONE FAMILY UNIT who live together.

-----Please note that following each Mass, the pews will be sanitized and disinfected.

-----The parish bulletin will only be available electronically.

Finally, I ask everyone to be patient with the process as we return to public worship. I am sure we will have to fine tune things as we go along. Please know of my continued prayers for all of our parishioners and their families. May the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist, pray for us!

God Bless,

Fr. Robert Rayson
Pastor of St. Mary's and St. John's