



Our Lady of the Lake Parish
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May 21, 2020

Dear Parish Family,

I hope all is well with you and yours as we make our way through these uncertain times.

I am writing to discuss the plans for the “soft” re-opening of public liturgy at churches throughout the Diocese of Cleveland in general and here at Our Lady of the Lake in particular. As you probably know, the Diocese has issued guidelines for parishes in this effort. In what follows, I will share with you the plan that we as a staff have developed based on these guidelines. We have also discussed them with the parish Pastoral Council.

Before getting into particulars, there are some general principles which are important for you to know. **First, your health and safety are our primary concern.** Second, your cooperation, collaboration, flexibility and patience will be absolutely essential. Third, when weekend liturgies resume on May 30-31, it will be the beginning of a several month process that will involve adjusting and the plan. Fourth, and not least, when and how we celebrate the liturgy will change. The “new” normal will certainly be different from what we had become accustomed.

It is extremely important to note that **the dispensation from worshipping at weekend liturgies remains in effect indefinitely. This means that the obligation for worship at weekend liturgies continues to be suspended. I ask that you take full advantage of this dispensation, especially if you are in the part of the population that is at highest risk in the pandemic. That means those with pre-existing health conditions and those who are sick or who are living with someone who is sick should stay at home. It also means that those who are sixty-five or older would be advised to refrain from participation, at the very least until a few weeks have passed and we have had a chance to test the plan and make initial refinements.**

The Diocesan guidelines require that the entire worship space be sanitized after each liturgy. One practical effect of this requirement is that we will be changing our weekend Mass schedule in order to have sufficient time to do this sanitizing. **Our weekend schedule will now be 4 pm on Saturday and 8:30 am and 11:00 am on Sunday.** (Note that several other parishes in the Diocese are also making changes to their schedules.)

Another requirement of the Diocesan guidelines is that assemblies can be no larger than 50% of the church’s seating capacity (260 people). **Social distancing, which is mandatory,** will reduce this number significantly. I suspect that initially our numbers will be much smaller than that.

Social distancing means six feet distance in front of, behind and between participants. In our space this means **sitting in every other row of chairs, with two chairs between participants.** However, members of a family or a single household may sit next to one another. To accomplish these things, it will be necessary to sit where directed by the ushers rather than where you may have become accustomed to sit. I appreciate your cooperation in this. In addition, it will be necessary for everyone in the church, **no exceptions**, to wear masks or face coverings.

Entry into the church building will be permitted only at the southeast entrance (parking lot side closest to Lake Shore Boulevard). I strongly suggest that you arrive no earlier than fifteen minutes before Mass. Ushers will meet you as you arrive and guide you into the building. Even before you enter the church, it will be necessary to maintain social distance as you wait. **Also, everyone is asked to sanitize their hands upon entering the building.** To the degree that we can gain access to agents to sanitize, we will provide them. However, this has been difficult and it is probably wise to bring your own sanitizer with you when you come. After Mass, additional doors will be open through which you may exit according to directives that will be provided.

Congregational singing is indefinitely suspended, because singing spreads the virus far more effectively than simply speaking. Therefore, all the hymnals have been temporarily removed. (They would have to be sanitized after each use anyway.) Any music will either be instrumental or sung by a cantor. This will be a big change for us at Our Lady of the Lake, since we have a vibrant music ministry and very good congregational participation.

There will be no entrance procession, no presentation of the gifts, no (recessional) exit procession. When it comes time for communion, please follow the directions of the ushers in order to **maintain six feet of social distance between communicants.** Communion will be given only under the form of bread. Even though you may typically prefer to receive communion on the tongue, for the sake of protecting the ministers of communion and other participants, you are asked to temporarily set this preference aside and **receive communion in the hand.**

The ministry of ushers will increase in importance as we try to implement this plan. If you are willing to assist in this ministry, please contact the rectory at your earliest convenience. Since we will need fewer Eucharistic ministers and readers, perhaps some of you already engaged in these ministries might consider switching to or embracing this ministry in addition to your other ones. We hope to meet with you next week before our first weekend liturgies to make sure we are all well-coordinated and on the same page.

There are other details to be considered, but those can be addressed once we are at Mass. I'm sure what I have shared is quite enough for now! Remember, participating is not an obligation at this point. Discretion may well be the better part of valor. (Perhaps you could defer participating to one of the weekday Masses instead.) Thanks for your understanding and cooperation in all of this.

Sincerely,
Fr. Joe Fortuna