

A Path Forward

It's been two months now since we've been without public Masses, and needless to say the effects of this virus and policy decisions have impacted us all. And especially difficult has been the separation we've had to deal with from being present at Mass.

On the one hand it is important to keep people safe, which is why out of deference to the state, public Masses were suspended for the time being. At the same time, as more is learned about the virus and we are move into a period of gradual reopening, we also know we cannot stay locked down forever, and we also have a need to worship, to talk to one another, and as Catholics to receive Holy Communion and be present at Mass.

With that in mind, our archdiocese has been working formulating a plan for reopening when given the green light by the state of Minnesota. At the time of this column's writing, we were close to this happening. However as some businesses reopened last week, houses of worship were still limited to very small gatherings. Hopefully that has changed or will soon change. I have contacted officials weighing in as a priest and citizen as I feel this is important for people who, knowing the risks, discern that they would like to come to church. So what does our path forward look like, knowing that we have to coexist with this virus for a time until a vaccine comes out?

The Archdiocese actually has a plan of action which was sent to parishes.

What this will look like will be that each parish will be able to have Masses with no more than 1/3 capacity filling the sanctuary. Distance will be maintained between people who are not living under the same roof, and some pews will be closed off. Here at our parish, we'll have a rope closing two pews, meaning every third pew will be occupied. Hymnals still will not be used; people will be asked to receive Communion in the hand; and Communion will be given after the conclusion of Mass so people can stay in their pews with the communion minister going to each pew so as to facilitate distance between people. The obligation to attend Mass on Sundays will also be suspended still, and we'll continue to have Mass broadcast online and on local cable for those not feeling comfortable coming to Mass yet. In addition, elderly parishioners are still advised to refrain from coming to Mass, but this ultimately will be a matter for each individual as all will certainly be welcome. We also have anti-bacterial spray for the pews so they will be cleaned properly too.

Many of us are hurting due to the pain of being separated from others during this time. Our connections mean so much to see one another and greet one another; the Mass is a meal and a meal is a social event. That being said we must remember we are not alone. Jesus is with us even when we can't receive Holy Communion, and we continue to stay connected as best we can thanks to technology. However we also know this is not a "new normal"; a term I don't like to use as it implies things will stay in a new way. It's a temporary adjustment, and we are fully committed to moving forward to keep everyone connected as best as possible, both through technology but also through creating a safe environment for people to be at Mass again.

We've also had the "drive in" Masses the past two weeks - well sort of. Two weeks ago was the first time I had Mass with sleet on the altar, but we made it through and thankfully the skies did not open up. Last week however they did, so we had a "drive in" blessing. I could have offered Mass under the tent, but there is no way the transmitter and speakers would function in wind and rain. We also had some issues with reception, and we are looking at another transmitter or way to boost the signal. A big thank you though to all who came out, both the staff and volunteers who helped make the Mass and blessing possible, and to our parishioners who were able to come out as well. It reminds me of the incredible love people have for their Church and parish, and of how connected we are as a parish family. We aren't meant to be socially distant, but are meant to be together, and hopefully that will happen again soon.

You can watch a video from the Archbishop here: <https://www.archspm.org/covid19/> where he addresses the current situation. Updates will appear here too. We'll also be posting an update from the Archbishop on our website, along with any future updates.

Know you are in my daily prayers and I am remembering you at our private Masses I am offering during the week and the parish. Let us trust in God's guidance and wisdom and that He will see us through the storm.

God's blessings to you,

Fr. Paul