

Nativity of Our Lady Reopening

May 22, 2020

We are pleased to share the news the Diocese of Savannah has authorized all of our churches to begin holding public worship again. We will follow the diocesan indications, taking special precautions for public safety and health. **However, please know that the obligation to attend Masses remains dispensed.** Those who wish to resume coming to Mass may do so; those who are not yet ready for any reason, may wait longer. *Those who are most at risk of serious infection or illness, as well as their caregivers, are strongly encouraged to stay home and participate in live-streamed or televised Masses.* The risk of the coronavirus is still very real, and even with the best health practices and strict physical distancing in place, anyone attending public events, such as the Mass, is increasing their risk of exposure to COVID-19.

The safety guidelines and recommendations reflect the most current guidance from civil and public health authorities and are aligned with the State of Georgia. They will be updated as needed to reflect the guidance from our governmental leaders as we pass through different phases of recovery from the pandemic.

As we resume the celebration of public Mass, it is crucial that we approach this next phase with **patient, loving and charitable hearts. Here are some general guidelines to help us return together as a worshipping community:**

Physical distancing will limit seating availability for Mass. Pastors must abide by state and local laws and restrictions that pertain to physical distancing. This physical distancing will determine how many seats can be made available for Mass in the church or other parish buildings, so pastors will define a fair method for determining how many can attend any one Mass and ensuring the greatest potential for participation. Unfortunately, this may mean that by ensuring everyone has at least some opportunity for attending Mass, **no one should expect to be able to attend Mass every Sunday or with guaranteed regularity.** It is very important that you are registered with the parish to receive updated information regarding Mass times and who can attend. Please make sure your contact information is current so that you can receive updates through email or the parish website. Updates will be on our Facebook page as well.

- For the safety of the parish community, it is important that those who are symptomatic, **feel sick**, have a fever, have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, or have travelled internationally or to a domestic hot spot in the past two weeks, stay home. Because of the general dispensation, there is no obligation at this time to attend Mass, so there is no sin if you stay home for any reason.
- The wearing of **masks** for ages three and up is highly recommended. We do this to protect others.
- We do not have a large supply of **hand sanitizer**. We strongly encourage each family or individual to bring their own supply.
- We strongly encourage all parishioners to maintain proper physical distancing on church property (on the steps, on the sidewalks, in the parking lot, etc.). Before and after Mass, even though we have been isolated for a long time, please do not congregate in the church for conversations.

We have put away **hymnals/missalettes** for sanitary purposes so we encourage you to bring worship resources (Magnificat magazine at <https://us.magnificat.net/free>, Roman missal, or a print out of readings). We will offer bulletins with the readings in them. You should take the bulletin with you after mass. Please do not return or leave the bulletin in the pew.

Our diocesan standard is to admit no more than 25% of our capacity to allow for proper social spacing. Our capacity is approximately 100 which equals 25 persons.

LIMITING THE SIZE OF THE CONGREGATION AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- Greeters will **open the doors** as you arrive so that multiple people are not touching the door handles.
- Please follow the **greeters' directions** in regards to seating.
- Once those are filled we will not be able to admit any more persons.
- Since the obligation is lifted for attending Sunday mass you may wish to consider **daily mass** at St. Francis Xavier where seating will be more available. Thus you may wish to watch the Sunday livestream of the mass and attend mass on a weekday.

- Members of a single household do not need to practice social distancing **with each other** so they may sit together in the same row.
- If a group arrived in a single private vehicle, they could also sit together.
- While these groups may sit together, spacing between units and others is still 6 feet.
- Due to social spacing the social hall and gathering after Sunday Mass will be suspended for the time being.
- Please reserve the end of pews for parents with small children so they may get up and walk if the child is agitated.
- We will not have **altar servers** during this period.
- We will use volunteer **lectors**. One lector will serve at each mass. Volunteers please contact Nadine at the office.
- We will use **cantor** only. The **choir** will not resume until it is deemed safe to do so.
- There will be no **holy Water** fonts but you are encouraged to make the sign of cross as you enter to recall your baptism.
- The pews and other common surfaces in the church will be cleaned and sanitized between Masses. Volunteers please contact Nadine at the office.

OFFERTORY AND COLLECTION

- **Baskets** will be placed by the entrances where you may place your offering as you enter the church. We encourage you to consider using the **on-line giving program** through the diocese which is sent to us at: <https://apps.diosav.org/online-giving> or to mail in your contribution to our office.
- The offertory procession (bringing up the gifts) will be omitted, the gifts will be placed on the credence table in the sanctuary.
- We will forego the **sign of Peace**.

HOLY COMMUNION

- There will be no communion **chalices**.
- In the **communion** line, please maintain six feet of distance from the person in front of you, if they are not part of your household. We will go row by row

to allow those to come up and return to their seats and still have physical distance maintained.

- If you are receiving Holy Communion please wear your mask in line. Immediately before Communion lower your mask to communicate. Please wear the mask on the way back to your seat.
- Receiving Holy Communion in the hand is preferable, although receiving Holy Communion on the tongue will not be denied.
- If you wear gloves you must remove them for Holy Communion.
- If the priest believes he touched the hands or mouth of a recipient, he will pause and use hand sanitizer that is sitting on a table before continuing.

MASS TIMES

- **Mass Times:** Saturday Vigil at 5:00 pm.
- Sunday: **8:30 a.m.** (no music or cantor). This is a new temporary offering during the crisis.
- 10:00 a.m. Masses (music and cantor)
- If we meet capacity in the church we will do overflow in the social hall with a video feed of the Mass. Communion will be brought to the hall.
- **Daily Mass Schedule at St. Francis Xavier:** Mondays at Noon. Tuesday thru Friday at 8:00 a.m. Wed. nights (beginning June 3) at 7:00 pm.
- We will continue to **livestream daily mass as we have been and the Sat. 5:00 pm vigil.** We will switch the **Sunday livestream** to 11:00 a.m. only.

CONFESSIONS

Confessions will take place Saturdays at 4:00 pm before the vigil mass or by appointment during the week.

PARISH OFFICE

Our parish office will re-open on Tuesday, May 26. You may continue to reach us through email and phone. If you visit the office please wear a mask and use physical distancing when conversing with the staff. If it can be taken care over the phone/mailed in, please consider doing that as the office space is small.

Let us be careful about making assumptions about other people's comfort levels – even if they are friends or long-time “pew mates.” We do not always know the anxiety or fear that another may have, or perhaps even a health concern. We should all strive to follow the recommended protocols and ask permission if we wish to break with them.

Please note that as new data about the Covid-19 becomes available these best practices may change. We will keep the Nativity of Our Lady Website up to date with the latest best practices (<http://www.nativitydarien.us/>).

That said, there is also no way that Nativity ministers, staff, or volunteers can reasonably enforce all protocols. Besides, we all need to be responsible adults, being especially attentive to children, who may not understand the changes that we must make. If at any time you feel uncomfortable because of someone else, consider charitably and calmly getting up and moving.

As has been the case throughout this entire time of pandemic, we will regularly review all policies and provisions and determine if any changes are needed. We will promptly communicate such changes with you. We know that not all of you will feel comfortable coming to Mass just yet – or you may prudently need to stay away for another reason.

Be at peace, and know that we are praying for you and yours. Please pray for us – and let us know if there is any way that we can be of service. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

In Christ,

Fr. Tim McKeown

Fr. Chris Hassel