

SAFETY REQUIREMENTS: “WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RETURNING TO MASS”

Dear Fellow Disciples,

Well, after two months of watching Mass from home, we can now celebrate liturgies inside the walls of our churches again. After all, Mass is the most “essential” activity in the world.

Last week, Bishop Gruss announced the resumption of public liturgies in the Diocese of Saginaw. He also instituted a number of safety requirements that must be followed as we gradually get back to normal over time. These have all been posted on the parish website, gladwinharrisoncatholic.com. Please read them carefully.

In addition to what Bishop said, I need to explain 8 specific points. The first thing you need to know is that:

1. **Public Masses will resume per our normal, pre-lockdown schedule starting Saturday, May 30th.** You can always find the latest schedule for both parishes on our website gladwinharrisoncatholic.com and the myParish smartphone app.
2. **Confessions will be heard** the 1st and 3rd Saturdays in the narthex at Sacred Heart **after** the 5pm Mass, and at St. Athanasius on the 2nd and 4th Sundays **after** the Sunday 11am Mass in the cryroom. Please wear your face mask and remain behind the screen.

The following safety requirements are in effect immediately until August 30 or until further direction by Bishop Gruss:

3. **Everyone attending Mass must wear face coverings. Masks are not optional. They must be worn by everyone in and around the church.** Even if you think you’re immune to the virus, please wear your mask for the safety and comfort of others. Bishop Gruss had a videoconference with all of the clergy last week, and his message was loud and clear: no mask = no Mass.

Masks may be removed momentarily to receive Communion. Per the Bishop, the only exceptions for are children under two years old and the priest when he is in the sanctuary.

4. **All of the missalettes and blue pew cards have been removed to minimize shared touch surfaces.** There will not be a choir, and only the cantor will be singing. Because singing without missalettes and while wearing masks is not only difficult but can still spread particles, singing is discouraged. Sing in your heart instead.

5. **Everyone must practice physical distancing.** Inside churches and on church property, physical distancing must be practiced by staying at least six feet apart, with the exception of individuals from the same household.

We are required not to exceed 25 percent capacity in order to allow space for such distancing, so, for both Sacred Heart and St. Athanasius, this means 120 people maximum per Mass per location. The ushers will be keeping count.

This is honestly going to be very hard to pull off, because not everyone will get the message. I know that some parishes are doing an internet-based lottery or reservation system, but that's fraught with many of its own problems, starting with the fact that many of our folks don't have internet. Many other parishes are simply doing first-come, first-served, and that's what we're going to have to do.

At Sacred Heart the choir loft will be open, and at St. Athanasius, seats have been set up in the social hall, but remember, we can't have more than 120 people at a time.

Many of the church's seats have been taped off. The ushers will be counting as people enter, so please don't take offense if you're number 121 and declined entrance. This is for everyone's safety, including yours. It won't be perfect—but we're sort of flying by the seat of our pants right now.

Please know that every weekend I'll be monitoring attendance, and if necessary I'll add Masses to the weekend schedule to help ensure that nobody is turned away. The church will need to be cleaned and sanitized after every Mass.

At Sacred Heart, Sunday is always more heavily attended. So if you're normally a Sunday person, you can help by coming on Saturdays for a while instead. Also at Sacred Heart, the two south doors along the side-street will be for exiting only.

Bishop Gruss reminds us that those older than 65 (the recommended CDC age), those with a compromised health condition and/or caring for the sick in any way, are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and should stay home for now.

Both of our churches will be open on weekdays for private prayer.

6. **Holy Communion will be distributed *after* the Final Blessing.** This means that those who wish to receive will stay in their pews after the Final Blessing, and those who don't will leave in silence, again, maintaining physical distance.

I know this is a major change, but please remember that there is **no** moral obligation to receive Communion at any given Mass. Many people are confused about this, so let me explain. Although the ideal is to receive Communion at every Mass assuming you are free from any unconfessed mortal sin, you do not sin if you choose not to receive Communion. In fact, the Church requires us to receive only once per year.

Those who remain after the Final Blessing will then come forward to receive. While in the Communion line, please stand six feet apart from each other.

You have the right to receive the Body of Christ on the tongue and, in this country, you have the option of receiving in the hand. If you receive on the tongue, please stick your tongue out and do not lunge. If you receive on the hand, please be sure to inspect your hand for any particles and consume them immediately.

The distribution of the Precious Blood will continue to be suspended.

7. Church facilities will be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

The churches will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after each Mass. Items used by the public will be disinfected, such as door handles, restrooms and pews. All sacred vessels will be cleaned with warm water and soap as well as isopropyl alcohol.

If a Mass is added to the schedule, time will have to be allotted for cleaning before the next Mass can occur.

Hand sanitizer is available near the entrances of the church. Use it when you enter. Please bring your own hand sanitizer and use it before Communion.

8. Bishop Gruss has extended the dispensation from our Sunday obligation to attend Mass through Sunday, August 30th and it applies to everyone.

This means that although public weekend Masses are resuming, nobody is required to attend in person. You can instead continue to pray along with the Sunday Mass on TV or internet and keep the Lord's Day holy at home.

For the foreseeable future, I plan to continue uploading the weekend parish Masses on YouTube for the benefit of those who stay at home.

Before ending, let me just say that church life is going to look very different for a while. Expect some differences. It's going to take a lot of adjustment. Although the parish offices will be staffed, the offices are closed to all meetings and functions unless given permission by me. Councils, classes, and other meetings will be held via

videoconference. As I said, many changes, but necessary changes. It won't be like we're just flipping a switch and instantly turning everything back to normal, but hopefully these will be temporary measures.

If you need to reach me or anyone on the parish staff, please don't hesitate to call or email us. We're here for you. I ask you all to be patient and flexible, and continue to love and support each other. We will get through this together.

Thank you to all who have continued to monetarily support the parishes during the lockdown. Although the Church is not of the world, she operates in the world, and it takes financial resources to work in this world.

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus have mercy on us; and may St. Athanasius intercede for us. Thank you for your attention.

In Christ,
Fr. J. Marcel Portelli
Pastor