

Transition to public Masses and “restarting” our public worship

To all Parishioners of Marshall, Milroy, and Tracy,

First, dear friends in Christ, I want to tell you how we have missed seeing you. Lent, our time in the dry desert, was much longer than we had anticipated when we began on Ash Wednesday. As we move incrementally back to Mass, I want to write to you about what will be done in our parishes in this “phase 2” of where we are in this pandemic.

For those who are not comfortable returning to Mass at this time and those who are in “vulnerable” categories, note that the Bishop still dispenses the Sunday obligation. Please also be mindful to not come if you are not feeling well. I have heard from so many who are eager to return to Mass, Holy Communion and the ability to pray in our parish churches.

The Minnesota Bishops issued some “protocols” or specific instructions to be followed in this phase. As we are so used to certain ways of doing things, this means we will have to be open to some adjustments for the next weeks. This is being implemented with the assistance of a “task force” who has helped to put this together. In the course of this transition, there will be some adjustments we all have to make. **Please try to be flexible** – whether that means sitting in a different place than usual, going to a less crowded Mass, or at a less convenient time. (Also note that the weekday Masses have far less people who attend as a potential option right now for those who might have concerns.)

All of these adjustments are being implemented to make sure everyone who comes to Mass feels safe and comfortable.

Please note the following carefully:

- There will be hand sanitizer at all of the entrances to the church buildings for people to use.
- There will be disinfectant in spray bottles and paper towels in the gathering space for people who wish to wipe down their pews before or after, with a garbage bin in the gathering space/entry way to discard the used paper towels.
- The wearing of masks has been encouraged by the CDC, but is not required. Please do what is most comfortable for you.
- There will be some pews marked off as “closed to seating” to help facilitate social distancing.
- There is a prohibition on choirs until we hear otherwise.
- **The Saturday 7 pm Mass is moved from Green Valley to Holy Redeemer Church and the 6 pm CRC Mass is also moved to Holy Redeemer Church beginning this weekend (May 30/31) so as to provide a bigger space for social distancing and to provide for more people to attend.**
- Please try to space yourselves out by considering a Mass that would have more room available, such as the Holy Redeemer Masses at 7 pm Saturday evening, the Spanish Mass at 12:30 pm on Sunday, or the 6 pm on Sunday evening.
- Please note that the 8 and 10 am Masses at Holy Redeemer are usually the ones that have more children and young families at them, so please take that into consideration in choosing a Mass to attend.
- SCRIP will be available for sale in Carlin Hall after the Holy Redeemer 5 pm Sat, and the 8 am and 10 am Sunday Masses.
- As we transition, for the next weeks some Masses will have music and others will not so that people can decide what is best for them and their comfort level.
 - These **Masses for the next weeks will have music:**
 - 8 am and 10 am Sunday at Holy Redeemer
 - 8:30 am at Milroy
 - All other Masses (5 pm and 7 pm Sat and 6 pm Sunday at Holy Redeemer and 10:30 am at Tracy) **will not have music for now.**
- Masses from Holy Redeemer Church, both weekday and weekend, will continue to be live-streamed for those who are not yet ready to return to Mass.
- Doors will be propped open before and after Masses so that people do not have to touch door handles unnecessarily.

- There will be no offertory procession for the time being. Baskets will be put at each entrance for people to leave their envelopes/contributions on the way in or out. The bread/wine/collection will not be brought up during the Mass.
- To limit interaction for now, there will be no greeters, and ushers will have a few different duties to assist people while avoiding any unnecessary contact. Bulletins will be available in the gathering space/entry ways of each church for people to take on their own if they wish.
- There will be no exchange of peace or distribution of the Precious Blood for the foreseeable future. (It is good to take this opportunity to note that although we are accustomed to the Sign of Peace at Mass and regularly receiving Holy Communion under both Forms, these are both options in the Mass. For Holy Communion, we do not receive any less Grace or any less Holy Communion by receiving only the Host, and in many parts of the world, it is not common to be able to do so.)
- **Before Mass begins, the priest will give a few words of instruction as to receiving Holy Communion. At this stage, only the priest (and deacon if he is at Mass) will be distributing Holy Communion.** When approaching to receive Holy Communion, please be mindful of the “social distance” of those around and in front of you. We have received very specific instructions about the care we are to use in distributing Holy Communion. Please be slow and deliberate about receiving Holy Communion so that we can avoid any direct contact between the communicant and the priest who is distributing Holy Communion.
- Please be mindful about not rushing out of the church after Mass to avoid crowds all at one time. (This gives me a special opportunity to encourage something that we all learned a long time ago: after Mass is finished, we should stop to kneel and offer some prayers of thanksgiving for the opportunity to be at Mass and to receive Holy Communion. If we do this, we should be able to avoid the big crowd of people all quickly moving to the door after the final blessing or closing hymn.) To facilitate this, at least for now, let’s have everyone wait in their pews and the ushers will come from the back of church forward to let people know when they can leave.
- We will resume our normal Masses at nursing homes and assisted living facilities when we are invited to do so.
- We plan on resuming Perpetual Adoration at Holy Redeemer on June 1st (Monday) at 8 am for those who are ready to resume. The organizers/leaders have been working hard to contact everyone to see if they are ready, and for those hours that need to be filled, making sure that they are covered. At first, Adoration will be in the St Mary’s School Chapel (located in Holy Redeemer School) as it allows for more distancing availability.

It is important to encourage everyone to be prudent about their decisions regarding their place in this “phase 2” for their good and the good of those around them.

I would like to thank my staff at each of our parishes, who have been so very helpful as we navigate through this pandemic as well as the “task force” who helped me put this together.

Also, many thanks to so many who have made great stewardship sacrifices in this time so that we are not experiencing the dire financial need that could have come if we all had not been proactive (while knowing that we still need to be vigilant about this).

The Lord will continue to get us through. One good thing that many have shared with me is that they have really had a chance to reflect on things like Mass and the Holy Eucharist in a deeper way after having taken them for granted and without much thought until they were no longer available.

Please be assured of the continued prayers of myself and Fr. Todd Petersen for all of you!

Sincerely in Christ,
Fr. Mark Steffl