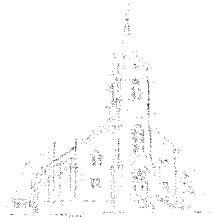
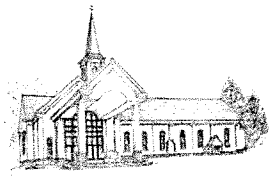


Church of the Ascension
St. Bernard Church



June 1, 2020

Dear Parishioners of Ascension and St. Bernard:

Archbishop Bernard Hebda announced recently that parishes may begin to open up and again celebrate the most beautiful Holy Sacrament of the Mass. In his letter he also said: "I need to make something clear about the return to Mass. The bishops of Minnesota have repeatedly told our pastors and parishes that they should only return to public Mass when they are able and willing to follow the many protocols that have been put in place – including sanitization and a few changes to the liturgy, particularly regarding the reception of Holy Communion. If a parish is not confident they are ready, they should not open. Period. And if the faithful feel safer at home, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days continues to be dispensed. Reflecting the current CDC guidance, we also strongly encourage those who are over the age of 65 or who are especially vulnerable to not attend."

To this end, the JMT has worked through the logistics needed in our parishes in order to comply with the protocols laid out by the CDC and Archdiocese ~~in order~~ to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The biggest requirements lie around thoroughly disinfecting the environment after each use, limiting the seating capacity to 25% and maintaining a 6 ft. social distance between family groups at all times.

Sanitization check lists have been created and those executing the sanitization process have been trained. A Covid-19 Preparedness Worship Plan has been completed.

Two of every three rows of pews have been roped off and some areas of the facility have been designated as off limits. Restrooms will not be available, so you are encouraged to use the restroom at home before coming to the church.

In order to maintain the 6" social distancing, ushers will be used to greet each family group at the door and escort them directly to a pew. The ushers will need to allow for the size of each family group and seat you in a manner that will maximize the limited seating capacity. Only family members living in the same household can sit together. Please be flexible as to where the ushers seat you.

There are other changes outlined in the enclosed "What to Expect When Mass Resumes". It will detail other things you will experience going forward until the pandemic is resolved. In order to minimize movement within the church, Holy Communion will be distributed at the conclusion of Mass. See the enclosed "What to Expect..." and "Safely returning to Communion" for the general steps to follow to receive Holy Communion.

With the requirements to limit seating to 25% as well as maintain a 6 ft. social distancing policy, that limits each church to approximately 19 spots of 1-3 people each. Family groups of more than 3 may sit together but they will utilize 2 spots. The ushers will need to allow for the size of each family group and seat you in a manner that will maximize the limited seating capacity. Plan to arrive at church at least 10 but no earlier than 30 minutes prior to the start of Mass as the seating process will take a little time.

Masses are scheduled to begin the weekend of June 13th -14th. To minimize the possible situation of more families coming to church than we can seat per the limited capacity and being turned away, we are going to implement a sign-up process using Signup Genius. The links will be available on the respective parish websites.

The link for St. Bernard is: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054CACA82EAAFF2-stbernard

The link for Ascension is: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/904054CACA82EAAFF2-ascension

To accommodate the cleaning process, our Mass schedule will be as follows:
Ascension: Saturday at 5pm; Tuesday at 6:15pm and Friday at 6:15pm (moved from the morning)
St. Bernard: Sunday at 10am; Wednesday at 8am; Thursday at 8am

Please go to the link for your parish and sign up for a seating spot. Please sign up for only one Mass per week. It would be helpful if you alternate between the weekday and weekend Masses to give everyone a chance to attend on a weekend. If you or someone you know does not have internet access, please call the parish offices for assistance. The ushers will have a print out of who has signed up and those families will be seated first. So if you come and have not signed up, you may be turned away. Please be respectful and do not give the ushers a bad time if this happens to you. These limitations are a result of government guidelines in agreement with the Minnesota faith communities. Without them, we would not be returning to Mass.

We know this is a trying time and we all want to come back and experience our Savior Jesus again in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Holy Communion. The steps outlined above are fluid and the beginning of trying to bring everyone who wants to back to the Mass while still maintaining an environment that limits the spread of the Covid virus. There may be changes to the way we are doing things, especially during the first couple of weeks. You can check our parish websites, www.ascensionnya.org or www.st-bernard-cologne.org, for any changes and updates.

Thank you for being part of our parish family. May God be with each of you and your families, and know that you are in our prayers daily.

In Christ,

Father Abraham Kochupurackal and Joint Mission Team

What to expect when Mass resumes

First, it is important to remember how the Coronavirus spread around the world and through our country. This is an extremely contagious virus and we need to take every precaution to prevent its continued spread. Keep in mind that any public place you enter potentially exposes you to this virus. As we come together as one spiritual family, we will be vigilant with our efforts in regards of sanitation and virus/germ transmission awareness while cautioning that we cannot guarantee you will be free from exposure while in our building.

Each individual should evaluate their personal risk to the virus prior to attending.

- The obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation continues to be suspended as long as the pandemic continues.
- All Covid-19 positive persons, those who are symptomatic, and those living with them must stay home.
- Persons over age 65 or with pre-existing conditions are strongly encouraged not to attend.

Changes you will experience

As we are preparing for opening our parishes to begin celebrating Mass again, please keep in mind that all areas of the building utilized for the service must be cleaned and sanitized after each use to minimize transmission of this virus. Some of the changes stem from these requirements. Here are the changes you can expect to see when you choose to participate in a service.

- To minimize the spread of germs, anyone attending is required to wear a face mask unless a medical condition prevents you from doing so. *Please bring one with you.*
- Hand sanitizer will be available at the entrances. *Please bring your own* if you have it.
- Ushers will greet you at the door and seat you. During this phase of re-opening, we can only utilize 25% of our seating and must maintain a 6 ft. perimeter around each family group. The ushers will seat you to best utilize our seating capacity.
- Please refrain from unnecessary touching of objects within the church building.
- The Holy Water fonts will be covered.
- Missals and any other items not essential to the Mass have been removed. You are welcome to bring your own personal Mass guide – such as the Magnificat publication or an app on an electronic device.
- We will refrain from singing as singing forces more droplets into the surrounding air.
- Readers will be using a separate microphone/ambo than Fr. Abraham.
- We will not be utilizing altar servers.
- During the 'Sign of Peace', use only non-touch methods for greetings.

Distribution of Holy Communion

Distribution of Holy Communion (hosts only) will be delayed until after the end of Mass and will be moved to the back of church. This will 1) minimize movement within the church, 2) maintain social distancing at all times and 3) allow Father to remove his chasuble in order to minimize cleaning of the vestment.

Please remain seated after Mass. Father will go to the sacristy to remove his chasuble, then proceed to the back of church. In order to maintain social distancing, the usher will release one family group at a time starting with the back rows and moving to the front. Instructions for the receipt of communion are on the back side of this communication. After you receive communion, proceed out of the church building and retire to your car.

We know some of these steps may seem extreme but our parish, with guidance from the CDC and Archdiocese of Minneapolis and St. Paul, is putting these procedures in place for the safety of all our wonderful parishioners. We love you and want to keep you around.

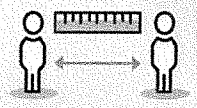
May Jesus hold you in His hands,
The Joint Mission Team

Safely returning to Communion

Please follow these guidelines for all to safely receive the Sacrament

Sanitize

Apply hand sanitizer before getting in the Communion line



Maintain Social Distance

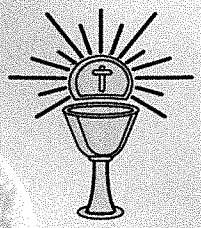
Approach the Communion station keeping 6 feet from all others

Keep your mask on

- Approach the minister wearing your mask
- Extend both hands, palms up, far in front of you
- Keep your mask on and reply "Amen" when the minister says, "Body of Christ"

Receive host in the palms of your hands

- Remain still as the minister places the Host in your hand
- Step 6 feet to the side, remove the mask, consume the Host, and replace the mask



Depart using a designated exit

Please remember to maintain a social distance

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL & MINNEAPOLIS