

Dear Parishioners of St. Benedict's,

We give thanks to Almighty God that through His grace, his Excellency, Barry Knestout, after consulting with the Governor of Virginia, has announced that Holy Masses will begin this Sunday, May 24, with certain limitations that aim to maximize attendance at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass while keeping prudential measures in place. Please continue to pray for Bishops as well as government authorities as they deal with this unprecedented situation. For the glory of God, we certainly owe thanksgiving as well as holy obedience for these guidelines. While we wish for no restrictions, let us reinvigorate our virtues of humility, patience, long suffering and fraternal charity during this period of transition. The specifics are as follows:

A) Mass schedule- ***The dispensation from the obligation to attend Holy Mass is still in place.*** Mass times must be spaced out not to be less than 3 hours between start times. There can be no more than 3 Masses offered on Sunday:

1. Sunday: 7 AM, 10 AM and 1 PM
2. Daily: 6 AM & 9 AM M, T, W, TH, Sat
6 AM & 7 PM Fri
3. Confessions: Sunday- 2 locations in office building, 30 minutes prior to Mass
Daily- church confessionals, 30 minutes prior to Mass

Given the capacity percentage established by the Governor of Virginia, our plan for inviting parishioners is by first come first serve basis.

All are advised to arrive at least 30 minutes prior to Holy Mass so they may be directed to their seats.

B) Pre-stage and set- up- the church's adjusted maximum capacity for seating is 180. Included in this number is seating in the choir loft, cry room, narthex and both sacristies.

1. In order to enter the church, everyone older than 3 years of age must wear a mask or face coverings, **and** it must be worn throughout the Mass except when receiving Communion.
2. There will be only one entrance into the church, i.e., the front doors of the church.
 - a. Doors will open 30 minutes prior to Holy Mass
 - b. As people arrive 30 minutes prior to Holy Mass, ushers will ensure people maintain social distancing while in line and each person or household will be asked the following questions:
 - . Have you or anyone in your household had a fever in the past 2 weeks?
 - . Do you or anyone in your household have a new cough or new shortness of breath?
 - . Have you come into contact with anyone who is positive with COVID-19 in the past two weeks?

If any individual or household responds "yes" to any questions or is not wearing a mask (3 years or older), he must not be permitted to enter the church. Also, if anyone who attends church tests positive, St. Benedict's will be closed for 3 weeks as a precaution.

3. Individuals and families will be escorted to his (their) pew by the ushers. You must sit where they assign you. If you are on the end, please slide over; don't make people crawl over you because you want the end of the pew.
4. The entire church must be sanitized after each Holy Masses. This includes restrooms.
Therefore:
 - a. Only one person is allowed at a time in the restroom (parents may go with their young children)
 - b. Go to the bathroom before coming to Mass
 - c. There is no reason for children above 5 years old, and especially teenagers, to go to the bathroom during the Mass as has become the practice. I expect parents to help me out on this.
5. All Masses will be Low Masses- there will be no singing and no choir.
6. The cry room will be closed as a cry room, but will be utilized for a family to worship during Mass.
7. Since the narthex will also be used for seating, it will not be available for parents to hold their children. For this the parent must take their child out of the building.
8. As of May 19, parishes are no longer permitted to use additional space (overflow) for Holy Mass other than the church proper. Therefore, once the 180 number has been reached, people will have to gather around the exterior doors. We will keep the doors open. They need to keep their social distance. They will be allowed to receive Holy Communion after everyone else. They will be conducted to enter the church through the front doors by the ushers.

C) Mass-

1. Parishioners will be allowed to receive Holy Communion at the Communion rail on the tongue. **Neither priest will give communion in the hand.** For those receiving at the rail, please kneel in front of the colored dot on the communion rail (for safe space purposes only). Members of families do not need to space themselves as such. Ushers will direct parishioners to the communion rail one pew at a time.
2. There is no procession of the priest after Mass. Afterward, a 5-minute silent period of thanksgiving will be allowed before the ushers escort you out one pew at a time, beginning with the front pews. The exits for dismissal will be the side doors only. Those in the cry room, choir loft and narthex will exit through the front door. I ask that all exit the pew when it is your turn to leave. It is imperative to have everyone leave, so the church can be sanitized for the next Holy Mass. Please do not give the ushers a hard time- remember, they are fellow parishioners. Those scheduled to clean the church may go directly to their cleaning station without having to exit the building.

D) Post Mass-

1. Already mentioned is the sanitizing of the church and the restrooms after each Holy Mass.
2. There are no socials until further notice.
3. Because it is not known at this time how many people will be coming to Mass, it is advised that the gatherings around the picnic area after Mass be suspended at least for this first weekend. Otherwise, there may be an issue of parking spaces for incoming Mass goers.

Miscellaneous:

1. Wednesday Eucharistic Adoration- there will be three 1-hour Holy Hours at 10 AM, 2 PM & 6 PM with public exposition. Confessions at 6 PM.
2. First Communion date- TBD (Sunday is preferred)
3. Confirmation date- TBD (Saturday is preferred)
4. Sunday Mass (10 AM) will continue to be live-streamed
5. Hymnals have been removed and no Mass Proper aids will be distributed, so please bring your own personal missal.
6. Special Mass for the elderly and those in the vulnerable categories on Monday 9 AM.

In closing, we want to give thanks to God for what He has done for us to bring public worship back to our Diocese. We profoundly appreciate your patient cooperation.

Fr. Forte and I welcome all back, and even though we cannot all gather together, it is especially good to offer the Lord's sacrifice with you again.

I wish to personally thank all who have supported the parish during these last 2 months; all who have worked hard to execute Phase I- i.e., ushers, cleaning crew, servers, behind the scenes movers and shakers; the individual families who have faithfully come to church to pray and help maintain the physical plant; as well as those who have committed their service for the coming weeks as we transition to normalcy.

Please be assured of my prayers, blessings and fraternal affections by the priests of St. Benedict's Parish.

Yours in Christ through Mary,

Fr. Neal Nichols
Pastor

This is all contingent on approval from the Diocese. Until then, we will not know if we will have Mass this Sunday or the 31st. Once we receive approval, we will let you know.