

Dear Beloved of All Saints,

Together with the executive council, I want to commend all of you for your great patience and fortitude during these troubled times. The storm we have been called to weather has been unique, and thank God we remain strong. Adversity is an opportunity for faith, and even more it is an opportunity for rejoicing, for “we also rejoice in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:3-5). Therefore, let us stand firm in our hope, and now let us also hope for a return to worship.

With that in mind, I'd like to take a few moments to share some practical information about the present state of preparation. Currently, we are instituting the necessary steps for returning to Church in a manner that adheres to the requirements that have been set by our Hierarch, Archbishop Mark, as well as follows the best practices that have been put forward by the medical community for dealing with the COVID epidemic. There are several necessary and important provisions that will need to be in place for us to return to Church as safely as possible. If you have any needs, questions, or concerns, please call Fr. Joshua at 570-489-0942.

I would also like to stress that if you are not comfortable returning during the earliest phases of opening, that is perfectly acceptable. There is no compulsion, no rushing of anyone, and no shame in waiting. Each person must know for themselves their own comfortability and risk level, and decide for themselves when is the best time for their specific circumstance. That being said, we must each determine to abide by the guidelines so that we can best ensure that we are safely and responsibly keeping each other's well-being in mind.

That being said, while not perhaps within our usual mindset when we think about coming to Church, the following 10 guidelines are adapted for the specific application at All Saints from the more general guidelines provided by the Diocese, and must be followed by all members of the congregation that gather for services until further notice. Although they can appear overwhelming, for the most part they are simply common sense practices, given the current situation.

1. *If you feel ill...* Anyone who is currently sick or displaying symptoms of the coronavirus must refrain from attending services.
2. *If you are at high risk...* If you are in a high risk category for health, please consider that asymptomatic people may still be contagious, and that although we strive to maintain a clean and safe environment, the risk of infection is still present. Those who are at high risk may need to consider consulting with their doctor before returning to Church.
3. *Social Distancing...* To provide for proper social distancing, all parishioners must follow the directions of designated ushers regarding seating in order to maintain proper spacing, as well as

for the flow of individuals to the reception of Holy Communion. (Those who spend time together outside of Church are not required to social distance themselves from each other.)

4. *Hand sanitizer...* Hand sanitizer will be located in multiple places for the convenient use of parishioners. All parishioners are also encouraged to bring a personal supply of hand sanitizer.

5. *Masks...* All parishioners over the age of 10 must wear a mask through the duration of a service. (Children under 2 are exempt, and children under 10 are encouraged to do so if possible. Anyone who does not have a mask can receive one at the candle desk. Please call Fr. Joshua if you have any questions.)

6. *Choir...* A decision of gathering individuals for the purpose of forming a choir or small group of singers will take place in concert with the Choir Director and Rector.

7. *Candles...* Individuals must bring exact amounts of money for candle purchases; no change will be made at the candle desk. For those who want candles, they will be given sanitarily by hand to parishioners by a designated person stationed at the candle desk.

8. *Ventilation...* Windows and doors that are opened before the start of services are not to be adjusted.

9. *Coffee Hour...* Gatherings of individuals in the Church Hall either before or after services are not to take place.

10. *Communion...* Communion will observe the following four special guidelines:

- a. The Communion line will observe social distancing practices. There will be markers on the floor to signal where to stand. This may mean that a communicant will need to wait to get in line until there is enough space in the line for them to stand.
- b. Just prior to receiving communion, the communicant will remain at the designated place until the priest completes the prayer for the communicant's faithful reception. At that point the communicant will be able to approach the Chalice.
- c. Each communicant will be able to take up a tissue for wiping their mouth after receiving Communion. After using the tissue, there will be a special receptacle for disposing of them properly. No one is to wipe their mouth on the Communion cloth, which is only there to catch any particles that may fall.
- d. The priest will give the communicant the precious body and blood in the usual manner.

As these procedures are new to us all in dealing with the situation before us, it is my earnest wish that anyone who has a question or concern to please call me. Not everyone deals with stress in the same way. We must extend grace to each other, fulfilling the law of love, understanding that everyone is under a tremendous amount of strain. Let us recall the words of St. Paul, that "love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all

things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). If we can do this, then we will overcome all temptation to any hardness of heart.

We anticipate that for various reasons not everyone will be able to return at the same time. Those who return will be offering up prayer on behalf of those who are unable to come yet. And I encourage those who cannot attend to take up a special rule of daily prayer until they can return, such as saying 100 times: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me*, and on Sunday say it 300 times. If you feel you need any pastoral or spiritual support, I encourage you to please contact me.

I want to especially thank everyone for their continued generosity. In addition to your regular practice of tithing and giving to the Church, if you are able to help with any needed tasks, like wiping down surfaces after services, helping to usher, or perhaps donating items such as hand sanitizer, that would also be very helpful. When the time is right, having these items in place will ensure that there will be fewer (hopefully no) obstacles to our finally receiving the blessing to reopen. We have received a blessing to begin Morning Prayer at 8:00am, Mondays through Fridays, and also to have the Church open on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 4:00pm to 6:00pm for anyone to come into the sanctuary for prayer and lighting a candle.

I understand this is a lot to process, and so I humbly request that anyone who has a question or concern to please call me (570-489-0942) in order to discuss anything that you may have on your heart or mind. Although we do not have a specific date, re-commencement of services will be undertaken with careful attention to trends and patterns in the incidence rate of the virus in the county, and with civil guidance in mind. In that light, we hope to begin worship with the earliest phase of returners as soon as all the preparations are complete and we receive a blessing from his Eminence Archbishop Mark. Please know that you have been daily in my prayers, and constantly in my thoughts. I have missed each and every one of you, and greatly look forward to seeing you again.

Yours in Christ,

-Fr. Joshua Schooping

570-489-0942

P.S. Please consider using the back page to answer a few questions, and returning it back to me for the confidential and prayerful review of what you might like to share. Mail to:

Fr. Joshua Schooping

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