

PASTOR'S UPDATE TO PARISHIONERS – T (5/15/20) – URGENT ITEMS

WHAT'S IN THIS UPDATE: (URGENT ITEMS!)

- PASTORAL MESSAGE TO PARISHIONERS FROM FR. FERGUSON
- BISHOP'S LETTER AND GUIDELINES REGARDING "RE-OPENING"
- THIS WEEKEND'S MASS – FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

PASTORAL MESSAGE TO PARISHIONERS FROM FR. FERGUSON

Greetings.

Today's "UPDATE – T" includes SOME IMPORTANT URGENT ITEMS FROM BISHOP BRENNAN regarding the "re-opening" of parishes in light of COVID concerns, which were just released to priests today (Friday). Please read these items carefully, including my comments on how we will be implementing things locally.

Because of the need to focus on these issues in today's Update, I will not be reproducing other attachments and items, **but please remember to continue to support our ongoing spiritual and community opportunities** that were described in the last couple of Updates, including the following:

- COVID Confessions by appointment
- Kenton T-Shirt Fundraisers to assist the local poor during COVID
- The Eagle Scout project

Attachments for all these items can be found in "Update R" or on our parish websites.

Finally, as a reminder, please keep making use of the **various Spiritual/Catechetical Opportunities** we've shared the last couple of weeks (see Update J).

Thanks for everyone's ongoing support! The following few weeks will be challenging, but together we will get through it with the grace of our Risen Good Shepherd!

Our Mother Mary, Patron of our Hardin County Parishes, Pray for Us.

- Fr. Bill Ferguson, Pastor

BISHOP'S LETTER AND GUIDELINES REGARDING "RE-OPENING"

As I mentioned at Mass last Sunday, **the Ohio Bishops recently settled on re-opening public Sunday Masses on Pentecost Weekend, May 30/31.**

However, it was not until today, Friday, that Bishop Brennan released his **“Letter to the Faithful”** along with separate **“Guidelines for Reopening”** to the public, which gives much important information about how he wishes the reopening process to begin in our Diocese’s parishes.

So.....**please allow me to convey to you the accurate information directly from the Bishop – along with what we will be doing here in Hardin County** – so everyone knows exactly what is going on; this will help greatly in making this hopefully a smooth process with a minimum of angst and stress.

As Bishop explains, **the resumption of Sunday Masses will bring with it a lot of necessary adjustments** to how Mass will be celebrated, given the need still to observe **social distancing**. Also, the Bishop offers guidance on when weekday Masses might possibly begin, along with when personal prayer in the churches might possibly begin, both at the discretion of the local pastor.

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY THE FOLLOWING THREE ITEMS PERTAINING TO ‘REOPENING’ PUBLIC WORSHIP AT OUR PARISHES, IN THIS ORDER:

- 1. The attached “Bishop’s Reopening Letter to the Faithful”**
- 2. The attached “Bishop’s Guidelines for the Return to Public Worship”**
- 3. My “Hardin County Logistics” below**

I will work with our staff and volunteers over the next 2 weeks to get our churches prepared for the reopening of public worship. **There’s a lot that has to be done in preparation** (pastors were just sent a whole list of “tasks” that need to be done inside our churches to get ready for “social-distanced” Masses.) I really do ask everyone to **PLEASE BE PATIENT AND SUPPORTIVE**. I know we are all anxious to get back to public worship and prayer, but, to be honest, **it’s going to be a different experience** (for example, we are going to have to keep people 6 feet apart in the pews), **and it’s going to take some time to prepare....**as Bishop makes clear in his Letter. We are trying to balance a lot of concerns, and most of all we are trying to keep people healthy. And a lot of this will also require us to “feel our way as we go along” as we all enter into unfamiliar territory. And Bishop has been honest with his priests about how challenging a lot of the uncertainties surrounding COVID and “reopening” has been; he is trying to feel his way through this, as well. I have been impressed with Bishop Brennan’s openness and well-reasoned approach to this pandemic (he has been in daily communication with his priests for the past two months), and I am sure he will continue to give us ongoing guidance as we may need to make further adjustments in the future.

We’re all in this together. And we need your help in the preparation process. **See #12 below under “Hardin County Logistics” for ways you can volunteer over the next two weeks and beyond.**

As always, if anyone has any questions, please contact me directly. **Thanks again!**

[PLEASE READ BISHOP’S TWO ATTACHMENTS FIRST, BEFORE READING BELOW]

HARDIN COUNTY LOGISTICS for Reopening – Based on Bishop’s Guidelines:

Don’t forget to read #12 below on how you can volunteer!

1. **Please note from Bishop’s Letter: “All Catholics in the Diocese of Columbus are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass at least through September 13, 2020.”** In other words, use your discretion on whether to come to public worship on-site. You are under no obligation to come, if you have any health concerns. We will do our best to follow Bishop’s guidelines to create a sanitary place and use social-distanced procedures, but know that there is always risk in going out in public, especially for vulnerable populations. To help with this...
2. **We will continue to offer Livestreamed Cluster Masses** even after “reopening” on May 30/31. To be fair to both parishes, we are looking into whether we can set up livestreaming at Immaculate Conception which can then be “rotated” with Our Lady of Lourdes on Sunday mornings after the reopening. We think we can. More information to come.
3. **Be aware: the inside of the churches will be a bit different.** Based on Bishop’s Guidelines, we have to do things like remove hymnals, mark spots for social-distanced seating, use only every other pew, etc. etc. **We will be not be able to use every seat. Seating will be more limited than before.** It may take us a couple of weeks to feel out how many people show up and if we need to create “overflow” seating somewhere. Or we may need to suggest that only a couple of “reps” from a larger family come to Mass each week on a “rotational” basis. Please be patient in that process.
4. **Masks:** As you noted in Bishop’s Guidelines, **all people in the pews on-site for Mass need to wear masks.** In other guidance given to pastors recently, Bishop indicated that those ministering in the sanctuary ought not to wear masks as they perform their duties (except for Communion).
5. **Liturgical Ministries:** In guidance that the Bishop recently offered pastors, it is recommended to keep people in the sanctuary to a minimum. As such, I will work with my staff to arrange that at most, we will have one lector and one server for a Mass. Since the Precious Blood will not be offered, per Bishop’s Guidelines, we will not normally need any Eucharistic Ministers.
6. **Confession times:** As Bishop’s Letter states, Confessions should still be by appointment only. So, for the foreseeable future, until we get more guidance from the Diocese, we will continue our “COVID-Social Distanced Confessions by Appointment” system that we have already been doing. (See the attachment in Update-R or on our websites for Sun or Wed appointment times)
7. **Daily Masses:** Bishop’s Letter says that daily Masses **may** begin Monday May 25, but Bishop has been very clear to the priests that this is entirely up to the local pastor, since there is a considerable amount of prep work which needs done inside our churches. So, he has told us that we can certainly begin the following week of June 1, if we wish. This is what I have decided to do. **Since public Sunday Masses will not begin until May 30/31, I would like to hold off on daily Masses within our cluster until after that, viz., the week of Monday June 1,** as the Ohio Bishops originally suggested. This is something that Fr. Jeffrey and Dcn. Mike are also in agreement with me on. Please be aware that we may possibly need to observe our special “August” schedule of a “split” daily Mass schedule; more specific information on daily Mass logistics will be forthcoming as I continue to discuss things with our staff.

8. **Personal prayer in churches:** Bishop's Letter says that personal prayer in churches may begin "next week". But again, Bishop has been clear with priests that this is left to the discretion of the local pastor. And, as with Masses, there's a lot of preparation that needs to be done. So, for consistency, **I would like to hold off on opening the churches for personal prayer until the weekend of May 30/31.** This is also something that Fr. Jeffrey and Dcn. Mike are in agreement with me on. Beginning on May 30, folks at Ada may come into the church, as before, between 8:00 am and 8:00 pm. Folks at Kenton may contact Kathy in the main office for access to the church during the weekdays (which sadly we have had to keep locked, even before COVID, due to local security concerns).
9. **Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament:** Bishop has also indicated that this is left to the discretion of the pastor to determine when to restart Exposition. Both parishes have typically done this during the first week of every month. Because the first week of June is so soon after "reopening" and given the uncertainty as to how many of our older parishioners will want to come on-site so soon out of health precautions, I would like to hold off on this at least for June, and re-evaluate possibly for July, once we get a better feel for participation.
10. **RCIA Initiation Sacraments & First Communion:** Although not mentioned in these documents, Bishop has recently provided separate guidance for pastors on these postponed sacraments. I will be discussing this further with our catechetical staff this week to determine what the best course of action will be. Those individuals and families affected by these postponements will hear from us in the next few days.
11. **Distribution to the homebound:** This was not addressed in the attached documents, but on his recent conference call with priests, Bishop Brennan was **very reluctant** for us to resume homebound visits, for a variety of reasons. And I am inclined to follow suit. Plus, many of our homebound are in nursing homes anyway which are still not allowing visitors. My local decision will therefore be to continue the current practice of refraining from these physical visits until further notice. We can certainly continue encouraging calls, notes, etc.
12. **WE NEED YOUR HELP!** Before we can reopen for public worship, we need people to sign up to help for two roles:
 - a. **GETTING THE CHURCHES PREPPED:** Help with sanitizing the inside of the church, removing hymnals, etc. etc. This would likely be done sometime the week of May 25.
 - b. **TEAMS OF SANITIZERS AFTER EACH MASS:** Bishop has told pastors that he wants the church interiors sanitized after each Mass (the pews that were used, handles, knobs, etc. etc).

So, if you want to help do the initial prep work, and/or offer to stay after your Mass to take 20 minutes to help wipe things down, please contact Kathy at Kenton (iccatholic@windstream.net) or Deb at Ada (oll@wcoil.com). We will have masks, gloves, and cleaning materials. Thanks for your generosity!

THIS WEEKEND'S MASS – FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

This coming Sunday's Mass will be the Sixth Sunday of Easter, and will be livestreamed on our YouTube channel. **To view this Mass**, please use the same YouTube link you have already been using for the Sunday Masses: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVxcsTyz-ukNpEDHVkQWKVw>