



September 15, 2021

Dear Parishioners.

This is my first time writing to you since I arrived on June 29th of this year and began serving as your Parochial Administrator. I thank everyone for your warm welcome as I return to serve in the community where I was a parishioner when I first felt the call to ministry.

The most visible challenge since my arrival has been the Coronavirus pandemic. In June, the number of COVID cases was dropping. We were able to relax social distancing requirements. That enabled Fr. Steve to move the 5:00 pm Saturday evening Mass back to St. Benedict's and returned confessions to there from 3:30 to 4:30 pm each Saturday.

We were thankful that things were getting better. During the month of July the COVID numbers remained very low. In fact, we had some days with no active COVID cases in Schuyler County. I began looking at further relaxation of COVID precautions. However, in recent weeks, the numbers have begun to rise to levels of concern. I know we would all like the Coronavirus to go away immediately. We certainly pray for an end to the pandemic. Until then, let us pray for the grace to persevere in taking wise precautions. We may not like facemasks and limiting our social interaction but we each need to use our reason, given to us by God, to make wise decisions. With this in mind, we will not be having a bazaar in November.

That being said, I would like to provide some updates beginning with the Mass schedule.

7:30 am Sunday Mass Time Change

Prior to the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, the early Sunday Mass began at 8:00 am. When Masses resumed after the shutdown, the early Mass was changed to 7:30 am to allow time to properly sanitize the church between Masses. Under current guidelines we do not need to sanitize the church between Masses. If things were to change and we do need to sanitize, we now know one hour between Masses gives us enough time. We also know that sunrise is getting later. ***Therefore, beginning October 3rd, the 7:30 am Mass will return to 8:00 am.***

12:30 pm Sunday Mass

While the 12:30 pm Mass time has become popular for a few people, we must remember that it was only added to provide additional capacity during the Coronavirus pandemic social distancing requirements. This does come with difficulties. It means I am doing three Masses in six hours (along with Rosemary and the deacons when they are on). We do our best to provide the best Masses possible for you. Three Masses are a challenge but we will do them while the Coronavirus pandemic warrants it. With faith formation classes for our children and youth and

RCIA beginning, Rosemary will not be at the 12:30 Mass when classes are meeting. That overlap presents a challenge also. Lastly, those of you who have attended the 12:30 pm Mass know that we have difficulties having music at that Mass. ***We are very grateful*** for our musicians at our Sunday Mass. They are all ***volunteers***. However, we can only ask so much of them.

This being said, after consultation with others, I have decided that the 12:30 pm Mass ***will continue*** for the month of October. No decision has been made beyond that. We will continue to monitor the status of the Coronavirus pandemic. When conditions improve, the 12:30 pm Mass will be discontinued. Please pray for myself and those who aide me in this decision to make the ***right*** decision.

Other changes at Mass

- Giving that social distancing requirements have been relaxed where possible, the Lector will once again process in and carry the Book of the Gospels.
- Sign of Peace – current diocesan guidelines allow us to resume exchanging the Sign of Peace ***without*** any physical contact. The deacon (or priest) will say, “Let us exchange the sign of peace.” Then you may turn to those around you, offering them peace and a nod of the head, ***but without shaking hands***.

What Will Not be Changing

- We will continue to keep a small number of pews taped off for social distancing for those who are unvaccinated and those who wish to continue social distancing.
- Hymnals – We would like to resume using Gather hymnals with prayers and readings in them as well as reduce our paper consumption and the work necessary for the handouts. However, it does seem prudent ***yet***.
- Under diocesan COVID guidelines we will continue not distributing the Precious Blood or having holy water in the traditional bowls.
- While we are resuming faith formation classes for children and youth outside Mass, we will not be resuming Children’s Liturgy of the Word at the 10 am Mass until conditions improve.

Outside of Mass, please note that we are working to resume our Community Table ministry. We are also resuming visits to the homebound, albeit slowly. Normally, I might do multiple visits in a row but this does not seem warranted yet. Visits are beginning one at a time. If you are homebound and would like a visit from me, please call me. We are also looking into visits at nursing homes but that depends on their policies, some of which do not allow such visits.

Lastly, as darkness begins to come earlier, we will begin locking the church ***on Saturday evening at 4:00 pm and Sundays after the 12:30 pm Mass***.

I will end with an invitation to a series of presentations I will be doing this fall on prayer both in person and via the internet. Please contact me for more information. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the office at 607-535-2786 or by email at fr.jeffrey.tunncliff@dor.org. Please pray for me as your priest and Parochial Administrator and be assured of my prayers for you.

Peace,

Fr. Jeffrey S. Tunncliff
Parochial Administrator