

Thursday, November 11, 2021

Dear friends,

Happy Veterans' Day! We join in thanksgiving and celebration of all of those who have served in the United States Armed Forces. Let us be sure to pray for God's blessing & protection upon them all, but especially on those currently in harm's way and for their families who look forward to their safe return.

### **A long-awaited announcement**

As you may have heard, Archbishop Etienne announced yesterday that he is restoring the obligation to attend Sunday Mass & holy days of obligation as well as the obligation to receive communion at least once a year. You can [read his letter online](#), [watch his recorded message](#), and [read about it in the NW Catholic](#).<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> The short version is that we are once again obligated as in normal times, **effective December 8, 2021** – the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

As Archbishop Etienne reminds us, those who have serious reason to not attend Mass are excused.<sup>4</sup> While not an all-inclusive list, this would include those who are ill, have significant health risk factors or care for someone who is ill or immunocompromised, as well as those who have significant fear or anxiety about contracting COVID.

### **An established record of safety**

In considering how to respond to the restoration of our obligation & duty, it will be helpful to remember that we have successfully and safely celebrated Mass together for over sixteen months! Starting with the outdoor Masses during the summer of 2020 and returning indoors that fall, we have celebrated Masses, confessions, funerals, and weddings as well as gathered for adoration, the Liturgy of the Hours, faith formation classes (First Holy Communion, Confirmation, and RCIA), and the 'Faith Matters' & Bible studies programs – additionally, small groups have resumed meeting together each month.

Throughout it all, we have been able to safely gather in prayer, worship, and study together. In short: **we can do this – and well!**

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<sup>1</sup> *Letter to people lifting dispensation from Sunday obligation*, Archbishop Etienne, November 10, 2021, <https://archseattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Letter-to-People-Lifting-Dispensation-from-Sunday-Obligationv2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Dispensation*, Archbishop Etienne, November 10, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/644069847>

<sup>3</sup> *Archbishop announces end of dispensation December 8, invites Catholics back to Mass*, NW Catholic, November 10, 2021 <https://nwcatholic.org/news/northwest-catholic/archbishop-announces-end-of-dispensation-december-8-invites-catholics-back-to-mass>

<sup>4</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2181, <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/528/index.html>

## **Changing focus from virtual to personal**

With the restoration of obligations, we will begin the process of phasing out our online streaming presence. **This will be a staged process over several months.** We know that many have come to rely on the ability to watch Masses online. As a community we must help those who can come to Mass but need assistance in doing so and (re)establish personal connections with those are unable to come.

The **first stage of will take place on December 8, 2021.** We will be making two changes to our streaming schedule and service. The first is that we will transition out of Facebook over to YouTube. The reasons for this are purely practical: YouTube offers much easier access than Facebook and a simpler interface to our software and hardware setup. [You can bookmark the YouTube site and subscribe by clicking this link.](#)<sup>5</sup> The other change is to discontinue daily Mass streaming, focusing instead on Sundays, holy days, as well as weddings and funerals.

After consulting with parish leadership & staff, and after much prayer & discernment, I have decided that the second stage of ending online streaming of liturgies will take place **on April 10, 2022 (Palm Sunday).** This transitional period between December 8, 2021 and April 10, 2022 will give our community ample time to not only get the word out, but also to connect with anyone who cannot come to Mass and establish a regular, personal, and individual pastoral presence. **Please note:** We will continue streaming faith formation programs, Bible studies, and other non-liturgical gatherings that take place in Sullivan Hall.

## **The heart of a pastor and of a parish is tangible & personal care**

I recognize that changes to our online streaming presence will touch many people, so I'd like to explain my reasoning. Foremost is the need to ensure that virtual connections with Christ and His Church do not become – as perhaps they already have become for some – the only connection. It is my vocation as a priest and our vocation as a community to call each other to holiness. We must never settle for anything less than perfect union with Christ and His Church, and we must not allow a temporary aid in a time of isolation to become a substitute for meaningful personal connection to the Christ our Head and His Body, the Church.

Second, we who can come to Mass need to ensure that we are not settling with offering just a virtual presence to those cannot return – especially those who face a long-term or indefinite separation from in-person gatherings. A few clicks and a video cast into the ether may transmit the daily readings and prayers, but cannot convey the depths of our pastoral care and personal presence to those who need it most.

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<sup>5</sup> Saint Mark parish YouTube channel, [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC113T-YHd7-dU\\_7ez2apdhQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC113T-YHd7-dU_7ez2apdhQ)

### **Responding as a community**

If there is a particular exhortation I want to make to our community, it is this: **now is the time to restore & newly establish tangible and personal connections.** Many of us have been blessed to be able and ready to jump back into the life of the parish in-person. There are many who must now discern how they will do so – and there will be some who are not ready. For a select population, there is not the ability or freedom to do so. **It is our responsibility to go to those who cannot come to us.**

There is a special temptation that comes before us – that of passivity, of being satisfied with our own fulfillment of obligations, of simply enjoying our own freedom to come and go as we desire. How easy it could be to forget that not everyone can leave home, that some must stay isolated out of care for another, that there are those who do not have a car, someone to drive them, or even the ability to get out of bed.

This is our chance to shine as a community! It is my hope that Saint Mark parish would look at this moment as a time to seek out those who are alone or lonely and commit to being present in both prayer and in person. Would that every family adopted a homebound parishioner, that every able-bodied person would look to connect with one who is bed or wheelchair-bound, that every baptized & confirmed Catholic would seek to bring the sacraments to those who cannot come to church!

### **Inviting requests, responding to needs**

To begin this effort, I am issuing an invitation, one that I will be repeating at every Sunday Mass over the coming weeks as we approach December 8. **Let us together identify who within our community needs to be visited, has not been able to come to Mass, and/or would like help in coming to Church.**

To be clear: this is not simply a call for you to put me and the parish staff to work! Rather, we need the help of every parishioner not only in identifying who isn't in the pews or who could be served with a visit, but in actually reaching out to them. If there is a family member, a friend, or just someone you know who you haven't heard from or seen in a long while – give them a call! The Church is all of us and all of us can do great things, especially in the small but meaningful ways we reach out.

Over the coming weeks, the pastoral council, our parish staff, and I will be putting together plans to reach out to our community. One idea already being considered is a calling campaign to every single registered parishioner. Another is the re-establishment of regular homebound visits to visit, pray with, and bring the Eucharist to those who cannot come to us. **If these ideas (or one of your own) sound like something you'd like to do – please call the parish office!** We need your help.

### **Entrusting ourselves to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph**

This return to our normal obligations comes on a significant day. Not only does it mark the celebration of the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, but it is the final day of the Year of Saint Joseph. It is especially fitting that we would be called to renew our closeness to Jesus in the celebration of Mass and reception of the Eucharist.

It is undeniable that despite being another return to normalcy, this change demands much from us all. Discernment of our own circumstances, adaptation of the routines we've built up during this time, outreach to those who we have not seen (and perhaps do not yet know!). As with all things, we rely not on our own ability or will but on Christ – He will provide for our needs, strengthening us to do what would otherwise be impossible.

Rest assured of my daily prayers for you. Let together us call on the intercession of Mary & Joseph, that we might draw nearer to Jesus.

your brother in Christ,

Father Maurer