



Dear Parishioners of St. Timothy's,

Since mid-June, the Archbishop gave permission to cautiously begin the reopening of Public Worship, which began with *weekday* Masses at St. Timothy's on June 12<sup>th</sup>. At that point we were prepared to implement pandemic directives from both the State and Archdiocese to try to ensure the safety of parishioners attending *weekday* Masses within the required parameters allowed. That initial stage has proven successful in our parish as well as others. That experience convinced the Archbishop to then allow parishes to move to the next step of reopening *weekend Public Masses* starting on July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, beginning with the resumption of our weekend Mass schedule here at St. Timothy's (i.e. 4:00 p.m. Saturday Vigil & Sunday Masses at 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.) as before. The Governor directed that no more than 100 persons gather indoors, including within *houses of worship*, and follow all directives regarding social distancing, wearing of masks to protect self & others, utilize personal sanitizer, and in our case, the timely disinfecting of worship areas between all services to ensure the safety & well-being of all. The requirement of registration for attending a weekend Mass was also added to ascertain that we not go beyond the 100 person maximum mandated by the State and facilitate contact tracing afterwards should the need arise.

This weekend will mark our 4<sup>th</sup> weekend of implementing these directives and, as in the case of our initial *weekday* Masses, the implementation of directives for weekend Masses has also gone well overall during the last month. However, the resumption of liturgical services thus far this summer has also revealed another reality, namely the understandable reticence of people to fully re-enter activities on various levels of life, which they formerly enjoyed but now hesitate to fully embrace again, given the lingering concerns of a worldwide pandemic yet to be contained. While we have reason to be hopeful that better days lay ahead in coming months through the development of therapeutics and a hopeful vaccine, those days are not yet here. The implications of reopening have touched faith life and worship as well. While we had hoped that people would return to physically attending Mass in greater numbers in the last month and a half since Public Worship resumed, such has not been the case thus far in most churches. Here at St. Timothy's, while our church space allows us to have 100 congregants at each Mass with proper social distance, our weekend attendance for all '3 Masses combined' has not even reached 100 *overall* over the course of the last month.

The latter has been the same result for other local parishes as well. As of last weekend, *St. Peter Claver* and *St. Thomas the Apostle*, for example, have reduced their weekend schedule to 2 Masses at both Churches. Seeing the same realities this summer at St. Timothy's, I have consulted our parish staff, our Finance Council and Parish Council members, and have concluded that, given the tendency of church attendance diminishing during summer vacation and especially this year during a continuing pandemic, to henceforth *change* our 'August weekend Mass schedule' to 2 Masses as well - 4:00 p.m. Saturday Vigil and 10:30 a.m. Sunday Mass (both live-streamed each weekend), which will be sufficient for our needs while many are away in August, thereafter reassessing our realities as we approach the Fall and scheduling Masses based on our realities as people return to a more regular schedule and events concerning COVID -19 are assessed in real time.

We do encourage all who are able to join us for weekend worship this summer and receive the gift of Jesus in the Eucharist, the center of our Catholic life. We will also provide the same Masses 'live-streamed' for those unable to be with us.

May you continue to have a renewing, and safe, summer.

Peace & blessings,

Father Alvin LeBlanc