



THE CHURCH OF THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

May 31, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

On Friday, June 5, 2020, Lackawanna County will move to the yellow phase. This means that we will now be ALLOWED to resume limited, public worship PROVIDED we are able to conform to the guidelines of both the commonwealth and the diocese. After consultation with a special parish pandemic task force (a group of about ten parishioners with whom I've met several times), I have decided to slowly phase in our "opening" of Masses. This gradual plan will allow us to be sure that we are doing everything properly and safely.

Daily Mass will begin on Monday, June 8, 2020 at 7:30 a.m. Initially we will have a public weekday Mass on Monday, Wednesday and Friday only. The church will be open at 7:00 a.m. on those days and close at 11:30 a.m. Monday through Friday. In order to attend the morning Mass, YOU MUST REGISTER beforehand. The ONLY WAY to do so is online by means of accessing the registration process by going to our parish website (www.vbvm.org) and following the instructions. YOU MAY REGISTER ONLY ON THE DAY BEFORE the Mass you wish to attend; you may do so up until 11:00 p.m.

For those of you without access to the website, please enlist the assistance of a relative, friend or neighbor to help you with this. Please do not call the parish office to register; do not leave a message. Increasingly, it will be most important for you to be able to receive information by means of social media. Access to our parish website as well as our Facebook page will be more and more necessary. (I know it seems like this is way beyond some of us but, remember, over a hundred years ago, your grandparents, if not parents, had to "get with it" and put bathrooms in the house, sell the cow and chickens, buy a washing machine, get a telephone or a tv. Now it's a cellphone and/or a computer.)

For us to be fully ready to move all the way into the yellow phase, Bishop Bambera has emphasized four basic principles:

1. The obligation to attend Sunday/Holyday Mass is suspended for the foreseeable future. Therefore if you are sick, have a fever, an underlying health condition, or are at a vulnerable age, DO NOT COME TO MASS.
2. Everyone MUST WEAR A MASK in church except to receive communion (remove right before, replace immediately).
3. You must sit in a DESIGNATED SEAT AS DIRECTED to observe social distancing.
4. The church must be properly SANITIZED after each Mass.

A livestreamed Sunday Mass will be broadcast at 8:00 a.m. once we are up and running (some necessary equipment is on back order). Public Sunday Masses will begin, gradually one-by-one, once we have established a sanitization team and a greeter/monitor/usher team for each Mass. In order to comply with the social distancing requirements, we will only be able to accommodate 106 places to be seated for one Mass. [Everyone must sit apart, except for those who live in the same household]. VOLUNTEERS WILL BE NEEDED FOR THESE TEAMS FOR EACH MASS, one group of sanitizers and one group of monitors. You will be able to sign-on for either on the parish website as well.

Beginning on Monday, June 8th, the church will be open for private prayer, Monday through Friday only, from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The church will not be open at all on Saturday or Sunday until we begin to offer a public Mass.

CONFESSIONS will be offered in the vestibule at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday mornings. I will sit six feet behind a screen; a kneeler will be in front of the screen for the penitent. (Please do not come only to confess missing Masses, this obligation has been lifted during the pandemic crisis.) Enter the church on the rectory side, wait in the back of the church; to go to confession, enter the vestibule at the door near the restroom, and immediately exit the church after making your confession through the Albert St. side door. I will do something (such as ring a bell) to indicate to the next person to come in.

FIRST COMMUNIONS, CONFIRMATIONS AND SEVERAL ADULT BAPTISM/RECEPTIONS will be scheduled on the upcoming weekends once we are able to livestream these celebrations. These celebrations will be attended by ticket only.

FUNERAL MASSES will be allowed but all the restrictions and requirements must be observed especially regarding wearing masks and seating only in designated areas with social distancing maintained. More detailed instructions will be given to funeral directors. A limitation on the number of those attending the funeral Mass may be required.

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT REMINDERS:

- 1. REGISTER ON LINE TO ATTEND MASS.**
- 2. USE HAND SANITIZER AS YOU ENTER THE CHURCH.**
- 3. SIT ONLY IN DESIGNATED SEATS AS DIRECTED.**
- 4. MASKS MUST BE WORN IN CHURCH; ONLY REMOVED TO RECEIVE COMMUNION.**
- 5. STRONGLY REQUESTED TO RECEIVE COMMUNION ON THE HAND NOT TONGUE.**
- 6. IF INSIST ON COMMUNION ON THE TONGUE, YOU MUST WAIT FOR EVERYONE ELSE TO RECEIVE AND THEN COME ONLY TO THE PRIEST, NOT TO THE EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER.**
- 7. DO NOT COME TO MASS IF SICK, HAVE A FEVER, ARE AT RISK OR VULNERABLE BECAUSE OF MEDICAL CONDITION OR AGE.**
- 8. IF YOU CANNOT OR WILL NOT RECEIVE COMMUNION, PLEASE CONSIDER NOT COMING SO AS NOT TO TAKE UP A SPACE FOR SOMEONE WHO WILL.**
- 9. THE CHURCH MUST BE SANITIZED AFTER EACH MASS AND WILL BE LOCKED.**

Thank you for taking the time to carefully read this letter. We have many adjustments to make and get used to in the weeks ahead. I'm afraid that we will be in this situation for many months to come. I do not foresee any significant changes even when we may be moved to the green phase. Please know that I am deeply grateful for your patience, understanding, cooperation and support.

Writing on the Solemnity of Pentecost, may the Holy Spirit, the Advocate promised by Jesus, continue to teach us and remind us of all that He told us (John 14:26). And on this date, May 31st, that of our patronal feast, The Visitation, may Mary, the mother of Jesus and the mother of the church, the health of the sick and comfort of the afflicted, continue to be our example and our intercessor. As always,

May God bless you,

Monsignor Pratico