

The Catholic Community of Somerset & Swansea
Saint Patrick + Saint Louis de France + Saint Thomas More
Parish Office: 386 Luther Avenue, Somerset, Massachusetts 02726

May 24, 2020

Dear Friends,

Trusting this letter finds you well as we continue to move through these days of pandemic, I write today with information concerning the first steps of reopening our churches for weekend and daily Mass. Although this letter is lengthy, we feel it is important to share as many details as possible to promote safety and comfortability as we move through this reopening. Public Mass will resume on **Saturday, May 30**, and **Sunday, May 31**, the Feast of Pentecost. Daily Mass will resume on Monday, June 1.

After meeting with a group of parishioners from our three parishes and following the guidelines issued by Bishop da Cunha for collaboratives, we will use only Saint Thomas More Church for this initial stage of reopening. This is for both weekend Mass and daily Mass. Funeral Masses will be celebrated (with proper restrictions in place) in our three churches. Please note this is only temporary, the first step of moving through this reopening process. Eventually, we will once again be using all three of our churches. Even though Saint Thomas More is our largest church building, we must follow these strict protocols:

- + social distancing of six feet between individuals, couples, or family groups;
- + only 40% of the church occupied;
- + face masks must be worn by the congregation while in the building;
- + those who are frail or sick (showing any symptoms) must stay home;
- + the church must be thoroughly cleaned after each Mass.

Because of these protocols and the use of one church, we have temporarily adjusted the weekend Mass schedule. The schedule is as follows:

Saturday Vigil Masses: 4:00 p.m. & 6:00 p.m.
Sunday Morning Masses: 7:00 a.m., 9:00 a.m., & 11:00 a.m.

In order to follow the diocesan and state guidelines, we must know how many people we can expect for each Mass. You could call this a “reservation system.” We can safely welcome approximately 144 people per Mass. We ask our parishioners to please call this parish office number:

508-673-3022

to reserve a spot at the Mass you wish to attend. This is a first call, first attend situation. We are allowed only so many persons per Mass! We cannot have people just showing up. We may need to ask them to return at another time.

To accommodate individuals, couples, and families, we have divided the worship space. Families who have been living under the same roof, need not separate when they come to Mass. Family groupings of three or more will be seated on the right side of the church, as you enter. Individuals and couples will be asked to sit on the left side of the church. Proper spacing in the pews and between the benches will be clearly marked.

When you come to Mass on the weekend, please use the main doors of the church. Ushers will be there to greet you and ask you to first check in before entering the church. Only those who need to use the side door handicap ramp should do so. There will be an usher posted there as well. Masks must be worn in the church. Hand sanitizer will be available. We also encourage you to bring your own from home and use it before receiving Holy Communion. Ushers will be available to assist in getting you a seat. Seats will not be assigned.

We are not allowed to have missals, hymnals or missalettes, although there will be music. We are not allowed to take a collection, so boxes will be available in the church lobby and at the handicap entrance, each marked according to parish, to receive your donations. Separate, labeled envelopes will also be available for those who do not use the budget envelopes but wish their gift to go to a specific parish. Both first and second collection envelopes may be placed in the boxes.

Ushers will direct the communion procession. There will be only one place – in the front of the center aisle - to receive the Eucharist. Simple instructions will be given beforehand. According to the Diocesan guidelines, Holy Communion must be received in the hand.

Knowing that we have to thoroughly clean the church, we ask, unfortunately, that you do not linger within the building following the conclusion of Mass.

Parish bulletins will continue to appear on our websites. Please note we will also continue to tape our Sunday Mass celebrations and post them on our websites and on our Facebook page. Decisions concerning First Communion and Confirmation will be made after we have maneuvered through this first weekend. The guidelines/restrictions in place will also be necessary for those celebrations.

Finally, I repeat Bishop da Cunha's very clear directive: *The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass will remain in effect until further notice. There are obvious potential risks to anyone attending Mass these days given the pandemic. Vulnerable, at-risk and otherwise concerned persons are encouraged to remain at home. Those who are feeling sick, or have any symptoms of illness must remain home.*

I hope this information is helpful. I am most grateful to all of those from our three parishes who have offered their wisdom and assistance to make this reopening a reality. This is brand new territory for all of us. Patience and flexibility will be key over the next few weeks. From everything I have experienced in these pandemic days, the Catholic Community of Somerset and Swansea will rise to the occasion. Your support, encouragement, and assistance are very much appreciated.

Looking forward to sharing Mass together, I am,

Sincerely,

(Rev.) David A. Costa
Pastor