

# ST. BERNARDINE OF SIENA

Roman Catholic Church

## Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

As Prince Georges' County begins to gradually reopen and lift COVID-19 restrictions, the parish is making preparations to celebrate mass together inside the physical church building. I have met and discussed with several parishioners – 1) what guidelines should be implemented and 2) how they should be implemented. All guidelines implemented will be in accordance with the timeline provided by the State of Maryland and Prince Georges' County along with the Archdiocese of Washington.

## First and Foremost, there are some simple and important rules that we all must adhere to before entering the church as outlined below:

- Archdiocese of Washington asks that we remind you that the Dispensation from the obligation to attend mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation until further notice has been extended until further notice. This is for those who are particularly vulnerable to the illness due to age or pre-existing health condition.
- If you are sick, experiencing COVID-19 symptoms (high fever, sore throat, cough, etc.), been diagnosed with COVID-19; and/or have been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19; please self-quarantine or seek medical attention – **DO NOT COME TO CHURCH**. Catholic Mass is available on TV every Sunday by the Archdiocese
- All parishioners will be required to wear a face mask to obtain entry into the church and Siena Hall. If you don't have one a limited supply of disposable masks will be made available on a first come/first serve basis until they are gone. **THERE WILL BE NO ENTRY WITHOUT A FACE MASK**. This is for your own safety/well-being as for your neighbor.

## The proposed Guidelines to be addressed for reopening of the church are as follows:

### 1) Limiting the number of parishioners inside the church (mandated capacity)

- To control the number of people inside the physical church, we are asking everyone to enter through the main front entrance of the church. This will allow the ushers to properly track/count the number of attendees and assist in maintaining social distancing. Other entrances to the church will be locked until dismissal.
- If needed, Siena Hall will be made available to accommodate capacity overflow and/or late arrivals. Arrangements will be made to provide social distancing seating, broadcast the mass and distribute communion. Same rules apply (required face mask) for entry as church building.
- Social Distancing Spaces will be marked by painter's tape or other means to indicate where families and individuals may sit and stand. Markings will also be in the aisles for distribution of communion.
- The first pew in each section will be reserved for mobility challenged members of our community and their families; as needed
- We will ask that all parishioners maintain proper social distancing while in the church and during the service. Every other pew will be unavailable (roped off) for seating.

### 2) Worship Services Changes

- Communion will be distributed in only one form (host) and in your hand only.
- Only Father (no Eucharistic ministers) will distribute Communion in the church. If needed, Father may appoint a Eucharistic Minister to distribute communion in Siena Hall for the overflow parishioners. Masks will be worn (by the celebrant and Eucharistic minister) when distributing communion.
- Communion will be distributed by section by Row. The ushers will indicate when your row should come forward.

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- We ask that even if you are not receiving communion that you come forward and walk the path back to your seat. This will assist us in maintaining proper social distances.
- There will be no blessings conferred during Communion.
- There will be only one Lector per mass for both readings and no altar servers. Offertory gifts will be already placed near the altar. There will be no choir; just the solo cantor and organist.
- There will be no greeting (shaking of hands, hugs, etc.) during the sign of peace. We ask that you wave or bow to fellow parishioners
- There will be an additional mass on Saturday evening at 6:30 p.m. in Spanish (after the 4:30 p.m. English Mass) to help alleviate the number of parishioners at the Sunday Spanish Mass.

### 3) Exiting the Church

- All exits will be available for departure by row following mass. Please do not prop open these doors as these same guidelines on entrance will need to be followed for any subsequent masses held that day. Ushers will assist you in exiting the church in an orderly manner to maintain social distancing.
- Please do not loiter inside the church for fellowship. The pews and other areas will need to be sanitized before the next mass. Fellowship is an important part of our faith but please do so outdoors.
- Please also remember to maintain social distancing outside the church building in the parking lot as you share fellowship before and after mass.

### 4) Sanitizing/Disinfecting of the premises

- The pews and other areas of the church will need to be sanitized following every celebration. We are looking for volunteers who can assist to disinfect/sanitize the church between services on Saturday evening and Sunday.
- The restrooms will need to be sanitized/disinfected after every use. We will need additional volunteers at all masses who can assist with this task. Only two restrooms will be available for use (one behind the altar and the one by the front entrance) unless we have sufficient volunteers to monitor all three restrooms.
- The Archdiocese has requested that no Holy Water be placed at the entrance/exits to the church for public blessing. If Holy Water is requested for personal use, Father Raul may bless a personal container for individual use.
- The Archdiocese has requested that we remove missalettes/hymnals and bulletins from pews and/or entrances. Bulletins will be available on the church website ([www.stbernardineparish.com](http://www.stbernardineparish.com)) every week. For those without internet, a limited number of bulletins will be distributed by the ushers as you enter Mass.
- All ushers/volunteers will be required to wear face masks and gloves during Mass.

I realize that this is an exhaustive list and exercise, however most of this will eventually become second nature to you and your families. We are doing everything we can to make sure we prepared the church to be a clean and safe environment for all; but be mindful that this will take time and practice. I ask for your patience, understanding and prayers, especially for our ushers/volunteers, while implementing these guidelines. It will be challenging but we can survive working together as a community of faith.

Yours in Christ,

Reverend Raul de Leon  
Pastor, St. Bernardine of Siena