



Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

Office of the Bishop

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Memo to: All Pastors and Administrators
From: Bishop Bartchak *FMB*
Date: May 12, 2020
Subject: Reopening of Churches Phase One - for Personal Prayer

Beginning Saturday, May 16, 2020, pastors and administrators are authorized to reopen churches for personal prayer according to these conditions:

1. Churches may be opened at hours determined by the pastor or administrator, but they are to be locked at night.
2. Those who come for personal prayer need to recognize the risk of unintended exposure to the coronavirus and refrain if they are sick or at greater risk of susceptibility to COVID-19.
3. Parishes must have a plan in place for regular disinfecting of the church, extending to any surfaces that people touch, restroom areas, and other locations open to the public.
4. Physical distancing of at least six feet between non-household members must be observed.
5. Those who come for personal prayer must wear masks or face shields.
6. The maximum number of people permitted in the church (25 or less, depending upon physical distancing requirements) needs to be determined by pastor or administrator and clearly posted. The number of those in the church at any one time may not exceed this number. If people are waiting outside to enter, they should observe physical distancing and masking. Those already inside should be willing to give up their space after 30 minutes, with the possibility of returning later, so that others may enter.
7. Portions of the church may be cordoned off for reasons of physical distancing and expedited cleaning. All materials regularly used communally (hymnals, breviaries, missalettes, etc.) should be removed or placed in restricted areas. To the extent possible common touching of door knobs, latches and associated hardware should be avoided by propping open doors. Although all ways of egress must remain clear and available, ingress may be restricted as necessary for appropriate traffic flow.
8. Those who come for personal prayer should wipe down the surfaces they touch, both before and after their visit.
9. Parishes must have a supply of cleaners, hand sanitizers, and disinfectants available for use by those entering and leaving the church.
10. An alternate area such as a parish social hall may be used in lieu of the church if this permits better physical distancing and easier disinfecting. In such a case, the pastor or administrator is authorized to set up a temporary altar and tabernacle, but the Blessed Sacrament should be removed to the permanent tabernacle in the church at the end of the day.

Questions or difficulties should be addressed to Father Alan Thomas, V.G.