



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST Catholic Church & School

October 4, 2020

Dear Parishioners:

COVID-19 . . . 2020 Census . . . Supreme Court confirmation hearings . . . Presidential election . . . Know the topic that's making me more nervous than anything else? Christmas.

For Christmas-related planning purposes, I am making three assumptions:

1. The pandemic is still going to be with us, as will the requirement to observe social distancing, which means severely reduced seating capacity in our churches.
2. Family holiday traditions will kick in, younger children will grow excited with anticipation, older children will come home from school, and most Catholic families – even those who haven't been very "regular" in attendance since last March – will want to make Christmas Mass a part of their celebration.
3. With all the "normal" sources of seasonal anxieties being compounded by COVID-related concerns, people just might find themselves wound up a little tighter than usual in 2020.

Although nothing is etched in stone at this point, I am pretty sure we'll be going with the Sunday Mass schedule for Christmas Day (7:00 and 9:30 at SJB; 8:00 and 10:30 at STA). The big question marks comes with Christmas Eve: How many Masses? And at what times?

For the past few years, we've had two Christmas Eve Masses at each parish, one at 4:00 p.m. (the earliest allowable time) and the second at 6:00 p.m. While I would still anticipate having a Mass at 4:00 p.m. at each Church, I'm not sure about the second one or its time. Having a second Mass depends whether we have all the people we need – lectors, musician/organist and cantor, ushers, and Eucharistic Ministers – to do good liturgy. Its time depends on how long it takes to "deep cleaned" the Church after the 4:00 p.m. Mass; it might not be possible to do this quickly enough to allow us to seat people for a 6:00 p.m. Mass, in which case we would need to push back the starting time to 6:30 or 7:00 or later.

I am also very concerned about the possibility of having to turn people away from Church once it appears that we've reached capacity. I am not willing to compromise the well-being of the congregation by seating more people than we can safely accommodate; but it is going to take a strong soul standing at the door to tell people "there is no room in the inn" on Christmas Eve!

So, there is a lot to think about over the next few weeks. At SJB we will continue to ask people to register for Masses, especially on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. We may also move in this direction at STA, at least for Christmas Eve, but that decision hasn't been made yet. Once our schedules and related details have been established, we will get the word out to all registered parishioners by e-mail, snail mail and other available means. In turn, we hope for maximum cooperation on your part, as well.

Please pray for me, our staff and all our volunteers as this wonderfully important and sacred Season draws near.

Fr. Phil