

A Message from our Pastor

Rev. Philip D. Reifenberg



December 6

Dear Parishioners,

The Archdiocese's Chancery Office recently issued a clarification about "live streaming" Masses during this time of social distancing:

If your church reaches its capacity and additional people cannot be admitted, the principle of "No one is bound to the impossible" applies. If people cannot get into church for the Mass, there is no obligation for them to attend. For spiritual and pastoral reasons you may wish to live stream the Mass into a non-contiguous space and invite people to go there to watch the Mass. They are not attending Mass; they are watching Mass but they have no obligation to attend. Just as we can distribute Holy Communion outside of Mass at other times, so also Communion may be distributed to those who are watching the live stream Mass.

I want to share this information with you now with an eye toward Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Masses at our parishes. As you know, registration for Masses is the practice at SJB in Plymouth but not at STA in Elkhart Lake. Still, I expect that Mass attendance preferences will be pretty similar at the two parishes, so what we're learning at SJB will probably be true for STA, as well. And what SJB is telling us is that the Christmas Eve Masses are more "popular" than the Christmas Day Masses, so much so that registration for the earliest Christmas Eve Mass at SJB (3:00 p.m.) has already reached capacity and has been closed. Registration for the later Christmas Eve Mass at SJB (5:00 p.m.) is getting pretty close to reaching capacity, too, and will be closed when it gets to that point.

If this pattern holds at STA – and we won't know for sure until Christmas Eve – once we've reached capacity for the earliest Mass (4:00 p.m.), people will no longer be admitted to the Church proper. BUT they will be offered the option of going downstairs into the Church Hall, where the Mass will be live streamed. Chairs downstairs can be re-arranged to accommodate family units while observing appropriate social distances between those units, and a Eucharistic Minister will bring Communion down to the people where they are seated. Once the Church Hall has reached its capacity, no one else will be admitted there, either. The same protocol will be observed at STA's later Mass on Christmas Eve (6:00 p.m.), should the numbers warrant doing so.

With regard to Masses on Christmas Day, the early Mass at SJB (7:30 a.m.) still has plenty of room, while the later one (9:30 a.m.) is about half-filled. Current attendance experience at STA suggests that its 8:00 a.m. Mass on Christmas Day will probably be more well-attended than the later one (10:00 a.m.). We will be prepared to open the Church Hall on Christmas Day to accommodate overflow, should it be necessary.

Having said all this, I'm going to repeat the thought I shared a couple of weeks ago: since this year's Christmas is probably going to be much more subdued than anything most of us have ever experienced, if you are accustomed to attending Mass on Christmas Eve please consider breaking with routine and coming on Christmas Day, instead. But whatever Mass you try to attend at either of our parishes, if upon arrival you discover that you are not able to get in, remember the principle: "No one is bound to the impossible".

Father Phil