



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST Catholic Church & School

September 6, 2020

Dear Parishioners:

Version 6 of [The Catholic Comeback Matrix](#) has been released and goes into effect on Monday, September 14th. The GOOD NEWS is that we have progressed to Phase Two, which brings a little wider latitude in some areas of Church life and ministry. The BAD NEWS is that with regard to our most important liturgical event – Sunday Mass – it won't change things for us at all. The very first item on the Matrix is "Sunday and Daily Mass." In what is authorized under Phase Two it says: "Yes, with attendance limited by your ability to effectively maintain social distancing in relation to church capacity, following the Archbishop's Mass Directives. Strict adherence and vigilance with cleaning and sanitizing protocols." Our current practices at STA [limiting seating to every other pew and insisting upon six feet of lateral distancing between un-related individuals] and at SJB [limiting seating to every third pew and insisting upon six feet of lateral distancing between un-related individuals] already establishes the limits on the number of people we can accommodate while maintaining social distancing, so moving into Phase Two doesn't expand our Sunday capacity even a smidgeon.

The third item on the Matrix concerns the "Dispensation from Sunday Mass obligation" and says under Phase Two: "Dispensation expires September 14, 2020. . . . Pastor has the ability to provide individual dispensation." Now, the original cautions still apply: ***people who have a fever or are experiencing flu-like symptoms should not attempt coming to Mass. Moreover, people over the age of 65 and those with compromised auto-immune systems and/or pre-existing health issues that render them more susceptible to infections or respiratory difficulties should consider staying away, as well.*** BUT there is no longer a "blanket" dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass.

This raises the specter of the occasion on which we might find it necessary to turn people away because we cannot admit them to Church without compromising safe social distancing. Then what **Katie Kleiber**, SJB's communication guru, so presciently quipped months ago, will have come to pass: "We'll be telling people: 'you have to go to Mass, but you can't come here!'"

But we've got a little time before we reach that point, and both STA and SJB are looking at some possible ways to avoid such a distasteful development ("live-streaming" to overflow downstairs, adding Masses to the Sunday schedule, etc.). No promises; no quick fixes. Just matters to mull over as we work our way through [The Catholic Comeback](#).

Meanwhile, it might be helpful to know that in the fourth year of his pontificate [1299], Pope Boniface VIII penned a document entitled ***de Regulis iuris*** – listing eighty-eight rules of law which, while not laws themselves, were intended to guide the interpretation and application of laws. The sixth rule states: "*Nemo potest ad impossibile obligari*" – No one can be obligated to the impossible. A good thing to remember 721 years later.

Fr. Philip D. Reifenberg, Pastor