



July 1, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

Let me begin by wishing you a Happy Canada Day! I want to communicate our plans to re-open our church building to enhance our worship of God. I am being very deliberate with my words, because for over three months, we have *truly* worshipped God, even though we have not been physically together at the church. Still, the gift of being present at Mass and receiving Holy Communion is immeasurable.

As a staff team, we have been working feverishly to plan this re-opening since Archbishop Mancini announced that churches could re-open as early as June 28, provided all of the necessary health and safety protocols were being followed. We have had to adjust the plan as group limits increased from 10 to 50 to 200, as of July 3.

We will be using the weekend of July 4/5 to train parishioners serving in all of the new 'pandemic ministries', so we can work out a few kinks. Keep in mind that we have never done this before, and you have never experienced Mass like this before. **We plan to schedule a two Masses, for up to 55 households (including ministers), for the weekend of July 11/12.** We will learn and assess as we go, gauge the interest, and adjust Mass times accordingly. All this will be on our website: saintbenedict.ca.

I don't think any of us would have ever imagined such a complex situation with so many important, and competing, values. As your pastor, **I value your spiritual health** as paramount. We have done everything we can to try to nourish you spiritually online, and we will continue to do so. On the other hand, **I value your physical health.** Never before have these two values been at odds. Looking at examples around the world, we can see the way the virus is so easily spread when leaders were slow to lockdown, or rushed too quickly to re-open. I want you all to be safe and healthy, and I recognize that a significant portion of our parish (not to mention those who serve in ministry) fit into a vulnerable category. I want you to know that you shouldn't feel any pressure to return to our church building until you feel comfortable and ready. **The Archbishop wrote, "I continue to provide dispensation from the Sunday Mass for those who may not be able to attend for health reasons or due to capacity restrictions."** In addition to health concerns, our sheer size would make it challenging to accommodate everyone, as we'd normally see about 1,500 people over a weekend.

In addition to the above values which are extremely important, **I value our mission.** The fact that we have always been a parish striving to be on mission has set us up for success during this challenging time, and has allowed us to reach more people than ever before with the experience of our Sunday Mass. We have been receiving on average 11,000 views online every week since the pandemic began. **While I recognize the need to feed the flock, we have to keep catching fish.** I feel a responsibility to serve the thousands of fish who have started to swim in our spiritual waters. You might have noticed that the tech team, with the help of Divine Renovation Ministry, has done a remarkable job improving the quality of the Sunday Livestream experience, week after week, for the last three months. If you go back and watch a Mass from February 2020, and you will see a stark difference. We want to maintain a certain standard of quality for all who will continue to watch online. This includes a majority of our own pre-COVID-19 parishioners, who will not be returning just yet, as well as thousands of others, some of whom are newly seeking or recently returning to faith. To improve the quality, we have lots of new gear in the church - cameras, lights, TVs, speakers, wires, etc. It would be unsafe to have hundreds of people walking in and around this equipment. Nor would it be realistic to set it up and tear it down every weekend between the Masses. So we're trying to think of creative, sustainable ways to celebrate in-person Masses, as well as offer high quality online Masses... for the sake of the masses. (Sorry, I couldn't resist.)

In order to re-open soon, we need parishioners to step up to serve in new ministries, such as: parking lot ministry, registration tables, hosts, pew and washroom sanitizing, etc.. Please stayed tuned for how you can help us re-open in a safe and responsible way.

At this time, a priority is being placed on the sacraments, to allow people to come especially for Sunday Mass and Reconciliation. **We are not yet ready to have the church open for private prayer, weekday Masses, or meetings.** Every time we have people in our building, we need to consider these three S-words:

- 1) **Sign-up** (record the names of everyone, to allow for contact tracing)
- 2) **Supervise** (where are people traveling in the building, ensure physical distancing)
- 3) **Sanitize** (wipe down surfaces that are being touched - doors, pews, washrooms)

Finally, I ask for your patience and your prayers for the staff, all of our ministers, and for me. We are trying to re-open in a timely way, while maintaining all of these values.

In Christ,

Father Simon Lobo, CC

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