

Sisters and Brothers in Christ. We greet you from our kitchen here in the rectory as we prepare to reopen the pastorate of St. John and St. Joseph.

When it came to selecting a name for the capital campaign at St. John to restore the historic bell tower, we chose the name, The McElroy Effect: Restore- Rebuild- Renew. Fr. McElroy's legacy continues at St. John, St. Joseph and in fact all the parishes throughout Frederick County. As the parishes here in Southern Frederick County prepare to slowly reopen, perhaps it is time to call upon the intercession of Fr. McElroy as we Restore, Rebuild, Renew and now Return!

These last few months our parishioners have told us they miss many things about coming to Church, something that perhaps we all took for granted. Time after time we heard from our people how much they missed receiving Holy Communion. It is with great joy that we prepare to return on to Mass on the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ.

We have been preparing for your return the last several weeks. That first weekend in March when we were separated, we told you how much we missed you. That feeling has only grown stronger with the passing of time. We are so excited to welcome our people back to St. John and St. Joseph. For those are not in a position to return, we will still offer a live-stream alternative. We are very limited in our capacity, so there will not be seating available for all. Our joy is tempered to be sure, and we want to let everyone know what to expect upon return.

Even as we begin to return to both parishes, please know Archbishop Lori has dispensed all the faithful, regardless of age, of the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. That dispensation will continue for the foreseeable future. The process of returning may be slow and gradual for many. And that is how it should be; we want everyone to return when it is SAFE for them to return.

What are the conditions of return? If you have been exposed to COVID-19 in the past month, we ask you to stay home. Everyone should do temperature checks at home, and if you have a fever, stay home. We have been advised that older adults and people who have severe underlying medical conditions should stay home. We miss you, we love you, and we want you to be safe.

We are also very sensitive to the fact that wearing a mask or the very concept of social distancing will be very unfamiliar if not impossible for our youngest parishioners. Some of our families may choose to continue to stay home and celebrate Mass by way of live stream. We encourage you to use your good judgment in what is best for you as an individual or for the various members of your family.

Now we would like to offer a few words to those who ready and able to return to weekend Mass. In consultation with the priests of the neighboring parishes, we have selected the Feast

of Corpus Christi as the time we can welcome back limited numbers of the faithful. It is also a great time liturgically to return to the Table of the Lord.

Let's talk about some practical aspects of how we will return. The first thing we should note is the Mass schedule at both parishes will be reduced to allow for proper cleaning and disinfecting of the Church. Masses at St. John the Evangelist are as follows: The Spanish Mass will move to 5:00 PM Saturday- There will be no English Mass on Saturday evening in this first phase. Masses on Sunday will be at 9:00 AM and 12 Noon.

St. Joseph on Carrollton Manor we will continue to offer the live streamed 5:30 PM Mass with the current limit of 10 liturgical ministers. Please note this is not a public mass.

It is out of caution, and with the advice of the CDC, that we will suspend public singing. Since the 5:30 Mass at St. Joseph is not public, we will provide full music for those watching the livestream. Our parishioners are invited to attend the 8:00 and 11:00 Mass at St. Joseph. You will note we had to change time to allow for proper disinfecting of our church.

We will open slowly and safely. After we have some experience and time to make observations, we will consider Daily Masses, Saturday confessions, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and other devotions, in-person meetings and ministries. Our first priority is the resumption of weekend masses and reception of Holy Communion.

To allow for the necessary social distancing and reduced seating capacity, the number of available seats in the pews will be severely reduced at both parishes. We are limited to less than 1/3 of our established capacity. As a result, our parishes will be using an e-ticketing platform. It will be necessary to procure seating ahead of time, a kind of reservation if you will. The office staff will happily assist anyone who has a problem going on-line.

It is important to make use of this E-ticket platform if you hope to attend Mass. Given the very limited seating we do not foresee the ability to accept walk-ins unless we have last minute no shows. AGAIN if you need any assistance please contact the parish office.

As you arrive you will immediately notice that things look different. Once you are out of your car, please make sure every member of your household puts on a mask. Archbishop Lori, out of concern for the health and well being of all parishioners, has required everyone entering Church to wear a mask. He has also asked that our priests and deacons not be present on the front plaza to greet you. This is one of many things that we find sad but necessary during phase one.

At St. John's, the front doors and only the front doors will be open. At St. Joseph, the breezeway doors alone will be opened. There will be no need to make contact with door handles; we've taken care of that for you.

When you arrive, a greet will check your e-ticket and escort you to your seat. Should you find yourself in line waiting to check-in, please see the markings on the floor that will help you stay socially distanced. Please follow the greeter's instructions when being seated as we will try to maximize the seating capacity for each Mass. Many of you will find yourselves sitting in a seat or section that is different from your usual selection, your patience is appreciated when being seated.

Upon arrival at your pew that there are some markings on the pew. The middle section is blocked off in each pew. If there are people at both ends of your pew, please refrain from sitting in the middle blocked off section. If you are single family unit in a pew all by yourself, you can spread out in the pew. Please do not move into a pews are blocked off at any time. You will also note the hymnals and other materials in the pew racks have been removed. Please do not add anything to the pew racks during your stay.

We have been asked to continue to offer the sign of peace with no physical contact. Please feel free to smile, bow, or use the gesture we have borrowed from the deaf community (do the sign) to offer Christ's peace to those around you.

The offertory collection and Holy Communion will both look and feel a bit different. To eliminate the need for passing offertory baskets, containers will be available to drop off your offertory donations as you enter Church. We thank the growing number of those who using Electronic Funds Giving who can happily bypass the containers.

When it comes time for the distribution of Holy Communion you will be asked to come forward by section, remaining six feet apart in the Communion line. The maintenance staff at St. John has custom built communion shields for both parishes, to protect you and the minister distributing. As you approach the shield please remove your mask and slide your hands under the shield. The minister will distribute Lord's body in your hand making every effort not to touch your hands. It's best if you create a cup with your hands. Please do not touch the wood of the shield and please make every effort not to move your hands during the distribution process. We are asking those who normally receive on the tongue to make the personal sacrifice for the protection of the distributing ministers and all those who come from behind you, by receiving Holy Communion in your hand.

Out of an abundance of caution we will not be distributing Communion on the tongue. If this prevents you from receiving, please continue to pray the Spiritual Communion prayer. After you have received please put you mask back on and return to your pew.

Finally, when it comes time for dismissal, please follow the directions of the greeters who will dismiss by pew and/or section. Please remain in place until your pew has been called. It pains us to say this, as it goes against everything we believe about building community, but during these months of Covid-19 you are asked not to gather or congregate in the narthex or front plaza before and after Mass. Please continue social distancing as you return to your car. At the conclusion of Mass each worship space will be completely emptied to begin sanitizing and disinfecting the Church for the next Mass.

Finally, a very practical matter, the area of greatest concern when it come to spreading germs, is the use of restrooms. At St. Joseph the single rest rooms across from the sacristy are the only facilities that will be available during Mass. The rest rooms by the LaPointe Hall will be closed. At St. John's we will continue to use the rest rooms in the atrium but ask that only 1-2 people be present at a time. Cleaning materials, wipes and hand sanitizer will be present in each location.

We know that is a lot to digest and believe me when I tell you it has taken weeks of preparation on the part of our staff and volunteers. This is a crucial first step in returning to what will eventually be our new normal. We will do out best to make this transition as easy as possible.

To those who will need to remain home, know we miss you dearly and pray that you stay safe!

To those who are ready to return we welcome you with open arms – albeit six feet away and with a mask on! May the Holy Spirit that we celebrate at Pentecost be with you as we Restore, Rebuild, Renew and Return!

God Bless!