



Christ Our Hope Cluster

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Parishes of St. John Nepomucene in Fort Atkinson, Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Lawler, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Little Turkey, Holy Trinity in Protivin, St. Luke in St. Lucas, and St. Mary in Waucoma

21 May 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Happy Pentecost! The feast we celebrate this weekend has great meaning for so many reasons. First, it is the birthday of the Church, and we celebrate the Apostles spreading the Good News. Second, and more to the point of this letter, it was on Pentecost 2020 that we returned to public celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. I thank you all for your help in practicing the precautions we have put in place to keep everyone safe and to ensure access to the sacraments.

Thankfully, due to measures and vaccines, the spread of COVID-19 has diminished in our area. As a result, Archbishop Jackels will be lifting the dispensation suspending the obligation to attend Sunday Mass starting the weekend of June 5th and 6th. Additionally, he has given pastors the permission to determine what is most appropriate for their parish and to keep/relax precautions as they see fit. It is my goal to continue to provide safe access to Mass. I acknowledge that some advocate removing precautions all together while some are still apprehensive about returning. In recent days, the CDC has provided new guidance as to which measures are need and which are not. All of this was considered whilst weighing the options available. In consultation with the Cluster Staff and Cluster Council, the following have been determined:

- **Pew Dividers:** Starting immediately, to provide more seating, the pew ropes will be removed from one half of each church. With larger crowds at Mass each weekend, this allows those who are vaccinated and more comfortable with reduced distancing to sit in a manner that is safe. At the same time, having half of the church still distanced allows those who are at a higher risk, unvaccinated, or desire additional distance to sit in an area that is still spread out. As vaccinations increase, crowds grow, and comfort level changes, we will continually reevaluate how much of our seating is distanced.
- **Mass Schedule:** I have no intentions currently to change the Mass schedule as previously published. We will maintain four Masses per weekend.
- **Recorded Mass Online:** Since the start of the pandemic, Archbishop Jackels has said that Mass online is not a substitute for Mass, it is a substitute for **no** Mass. With the lifting of the dispensation from one's Sunday obligation, recorded Mass on our Facebook page will cease the first weekend in June. While I realize that some desire this to remain, it is time to return to Mass. Additionally, with the return of music to our liturgies, we would not be able to post videos with copyrighted music without paying a significant licensing fee.
- **Holy Water:** Starting the weekend of June 5th/6th, the Holy Water fonts at the entrances will be refilled. They will be cleaned regularly.
- **Music:** If musicians are available, music will return to Mass the first weekend in June. I hope to meet with all Custer musicians soon to determine a schedule which allows for music at all parishes at all Masses. With new studies regarding the transmission of

COVID-19 on surfaces, it has also been determined that the use of missalettes is safe as well. They will return the same weekend and readings will no longer be published in the bulletin.

- **Gatherings:** There is much concern regarding the return of funeral dinners as many of the individuals who work such events are at an increased risk. As a result, it has been determined that each family will make the determination as to whether or not to hold a funeral luncheon and any parishioners who work such events will do so on a strictly volunteer basis. Starting June 5th, parish facilities and halls will also be available for gatherings with restrictions following local public health guidelines.
- **Lay assistance at Mass:** The first weekend in June we will return to a full schedule of lay assistance at Mass to include servers, lectors, ushers, collection counters, etc. If you previously assisted in any of these roles, please contact the respective scheduler for your parish or the parish office to make sure you are included in the new schedule. If you are interested in any of these roles, we could use the help. Please contact the office to arrange instruction.
- **Sign of Peace:** As shaking hands still carries with it increased risk, we will continue to omit the Sign of Peace during Mass. We will reevaluate this as vaccine rates increase.
- **Communion:** Since the Eucharist in either species, the host or from the chalice, contains the entirety of the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, it has been decided to continue Communion under the species of the host alone. This will reduce the number of needed extraordinary ministers and eliminate the risk of consuming from a common cup. If you have a gluten intolerance, please contact me to arrange for a low-gluten host at Mass, and I will be happy to accommodate.
- **Greeting after Mass:** One of the hardest things about this pandemic has been getting to know you all while hampered by distancing, masks, and lockdowns. I will be processing out via the aisle after Mass and will begin greeting everyone after Mass, but I ask that we refrain from shaking hands for the time being.

This pandemic is not over. Certain precautions are still needed, but with increased knowledge about the virus and the vaccine, we are able to make some changes. While there are sure to be changes in the weeks to come, this will help us get started on the road back to normalcy. I ask for your cooperation as we make this transition and for your understanding as some people will still wish to distance and be cautious. We all have the right to be safe and comfortable at Mass.

In a joint statement, the chairmen of the Doctrine and Pro-Life Committees of the United States Conference of Bishops affirmed that **“being vaccinated can be an act of charity that serves the common good.”** I encourage all of you to receive a vaccination as soon as possible so that we can provide a safe environment for all. We will continue to work toward that hope. As we do so, I ask you to pray for a swift end to this pandemic and also pray for the souls of all those we have lost to this virus over the past year. With thanks for your help as we fight this pandemic and with prayers for you all I am

Yours in Christ Our Hope,

Rev. Nicholas R. Radloff