



Immaculate Conception Church

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It feels like it's been years since we went into full lockdown back in March, but it's only been a little over 200 days! In such a short amount of time, much has happened. Certainly, we have been through and seen great suffering and death from this COVID-19 Pandemic. And yet, in a way only New Yorkers could understand and do, we made the best of what was thrown at us: we went to streaming Masses; made curbside goodbyes of deceased family and friends; greeted loved ones through windows in nursing homes; and watched as our nearest and dearest disappeared into emergency rooms, closed to fathers and mothers, spouses and children, and even the comfort of the Last Rites of a priest.

However, in a similar New York fashion, we came back with a reinvigorated hope. First, we took the small but important step of opening our Church to private prayer, a feat that sounds simple but in fact took many days to prepare and execute to be as safe as possible. Then, with great joy, we opened our Church for daily and Sunday Masses. You cannot imagine the immense sense of exultation I had at finally being able to celebrate Mass with you all once again! And this joy continues each and every day now, for me and for my brother priests, Fr. Bill and Fr. Liju, and our Deacons, Dcn. Elkin and Dcn. Francisco.

As much as our Immaculate Conception Parish community is slowly beginning to feel normal again, there are lingering reminders of the dangers of COVID-19. We must still keep vigilant by wearing masks at all times, keeping a safe distance from one another, using sanitizer as often as we can, and (my least favorite of all!) not singing in Church to reduce the amount of aerosols projected into the air.

That being said, two parts of our Parish life that have not returned to normalcy are the on-site meetings of the various organizations and societies of our Church, and the Liturgical Ministries of Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, the Music Ministry, and Altar Servers. I will speak first about the meetings of our organizations.

We continued to keep the various meetings of organizations and societies canceled for many good reasons even after the Church opened, and I'm happy to say that this was supported by the organizations themselves. In fact, I'm so happy to see that these organizations and societies moved quickly to using conferencing services like Zoom to keep their work going! And I give you my blessing to keep using these services whenever possible, especially for those members who are vulnerable and cannot take the risk of joining in public with others. But now, the Bishop has given our Diocese a conditional blessing to allow the return of essential meetings under very strict conditions.

Therefore, I am announcing to the Immaculate Conception Parish community, and to the heads of our various organizations and societies, that we will be open for essential meetings beginning November 1st, 2020. However, this is not being done without proper guidelines and preparations; the Diocese has set out strict rules regarding the opening and running of meetings, and we ourselves have added on to these rules for everyone's improved safety.

I have chosen to be very strict about this because it is in the interest of everyone in our community to be safe and healthy. In addition, the current spikes in infections in parts of Brooklyn and Queens should be taken as a constant reminder of the consequences of not taking precautions and safety seriously.

As for the Liturgical Ministries, I have some good news and some neutral news. The good news is twofold. First, I have given my blessing to bring the various Choirs of our Parish back to sing at our Sunday Masses beginning the weekend of October 10th-11th, albeit with increased safety protocols. All people in the Choir Loft must stand at least 6^{ft} apart and must wear their masks even while singing. This is obviously a challenge, but one that the members of our Choirs, and our music director Eric Petrucci, have enthusiastically taken on! Second, I have decided to bring back our Lectors for daily and Sunday Masses starting on November 1st, but again with safety protocols. Lectors will not be using the Ambo (Pulpit) but will instead use the Lectern (the wooden stand on the Priest's side of the Sanctuary) for the Readings and Intervenient Chants. This was done to reduce the physical sharing of any space or object between the Lector and Priest. Moreover, Lectors will be required to wear their masks at all times outside of the Readings and Intervenient Chants.

Unfortunately, the neutral news is also twofold. The Ministries of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and the Altar Servers will not be brought back at this time. The major issue with these Ministries, as beautiful and important as they are, are that they are interactive by nature. The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion by definition must interact with the people of the Parish to perform their duties, and I am not comfortable putting both them and our Parishioners in that situation. Similarly, the Altar Servers generally work closely with each other, and are comprised mostly of young children, which are two important reasons to take more time to consider safe ways to bring them back to the Liturgy. Please know that I am working very hard with our Pastoral Staff and the Diocese to develop ways of bringing both these Ministries back to Immac as soon as possible.

In conclusion, we need to live by a sad but important concept: there is no going back to the "old normal" right now. As much as it seems like we are moving toward that, we are in fact moving to a "new normal". This means being safe, healthy, and smart about everything we do. We have proven over the course of these long 200 days that, as Catholics and Parishioners, we can be prudent, disciplined, and devout while this plague rages on.

Our Church is nothing without you, so please keep safe, and thank you for all that you have done so far to make Immac such a wonderful and vibrant Christian community!

I remain, as always,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,



Rev. Msgr. Fernando Ferrarese, Pastor