

Saint Augustine of Canterbury Church
Post Office Box 126
Hecker, Illinois 62248
May 20, 2020

Dear Saint Augustine of Canterbury Parish family,

I pray that you and your loved ones are healthy. As you may have seen or heard, Cardinal Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, Bishop Braxton, Apostolic Administrator of Belleville, and the other Bishops of Illinois recently shared their multi-phased plan for reopening churches in the six dioceses of Illinois. Specifically,

- **Phase I** allows for parishes to reopen for **Baptism, Reconciliation, Weddings and Funerals** with a limit of **10 attendees** (excluding ministers),
- **Phase IA** allows for parishes to reopen for **private prayer and adoration** with a limit of **10 attendees** (excluding ministers), and
- **Phase II** allows for reopening for **weekday and weekend Masses** for larger groups, depending on the guidelines from the state and the capacity of the church building. We do not have a timetable for Phase II, but no weekday or Sunday Masses with a congregation of any size are allowed until we reach this phase.

Our Saint Augustine of Canterbury Parish Reopening Plan

First and foremost, it is important for everyone to understand that our efforts will prioritize the safety and wellbeing of all while maintaining due respect and reverence for the sacraments and liturgical norms of our faith.

I will assemble a Parish Reopening Leadership Team to lead our efforts. Together, we will participate in required online training to ensure that our parish reopening plan conforms to the guidelines developed by the diocese in collaboration with civil and healthcare authorities. We will also assemble a starter kit of protective and cleaning supplies, as well as guidance for ongoing purchasing and maintenance of supplies.

Volunteers Needed!!!

We will need volunteers to assist with various aspects of our parish reopening plan. Importantly, leadership team members and volunteers should **not** be part of a “vulnerable population” (that is, volunteers should **not** be over the age of 65, and should have **no** underlying medical condition such as diabetes, lung disease, reception of cancer treatment, etc.), if possible. **I ask all of you who are younger than 65 and are healthy, with no underlying health conditions, to consider assisting with one of three reopening teams:**

- **Set-up team.** Sample duties include ensuring that all supplies needed for each sacramental celebration/gathering are ready for use, entrances and exits are marked and propped physically open prior to attendees’ arrival/departure, etc. **Our current sacristans who are younger than 65 and others who meet the criteria are encouraged to volunteer!**
- **Greeting team.** Sample duties include assisting in managing the flow of congregants as they enter the church, making sure attendees use hand sanitizer upon entering, are wearing a mask, and are reminded not to enter if ill, directing people to appropriate seating/waiting areas, etc. **Our current greeters and ushers who are younger than 65 and others who meet the criteria are encouraged to volunteer!**

• **Cleaning team.** Sample duties include cleaning essential and trafficked areas of the church before and after the church has been used. Gloves will be provided, if you do not have your own, in addition to approved cleaning/disinfecting supplies. Please supply your own masks. **Those who are younger than 65 and meet the criteria are encouraged to volunteer!**

High School students may serve on the Set-up and Cleaning teams, if they have their parents' or guardian's permission. Greeting team members should be 18 or older.

Those who are 65 or older might want to encourage younger parishioners, whom they know, to consider volunteering.

The Reopening Leadership Team and I will make sure that all volunteers are properly trained. Please send us a message at staug@htc.net, or call Joan Powell at the Parish Office (618-473-2217), to indicate your willingness and ability to volunteer. For those who step forward, we will also request that some act as volunteer captains to help lead each of the three teams.

Timing for Our Reopening

As I mentioned, the Parish Reopening Leadership Team members and I will need to complete required training, which is scheduled to be available online on May 22nd. Once we complete the training, we will need to review and complete tasks assigned to our parish as part of the reopening process provided by the diocese. Therefore, the soonest that any parish in the diocese will realistically open for sacramental celebrations (Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, Reconciliation) is likely the weekend of May 30th; private prayer or Eucharistic Adoration will follow when each parish is ready. However, our parish, like all others in the diocese, will move forward at a pace and timing appropriate for our own situation.

Following our online training, at Saint Augustine of Canterbury Parish, Hecker, we will only open our church once the Reopening Leadership Team and I feel confident that we have the right volunteers in place to make it possible to reopen. **Again, the need for parishioner assistance cannot be overstated.**

The guidelines and measures required to reopen are designed to protect our wellbeing and that of our broader community. As we learn from the first pages of Scripture, we indeed are “our brother’s keeper.” Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed, “that they all may be one” (John 17:21) and commanded us “love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (John 13:34). Our collective patience, willingness to help, and the care we take to reopen is a demonstration of our unity and love for one another.

May God grant you His peace during this difficult time and may He manifest His love and presence to you in abundant ways. If you have any questions, please contact me at (618)-214-6852 or at vondeeke@hotmail.com.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Von C. Deeke, Pastor