



St. Joseph Catholic Church
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sjccotati.org

August 28, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

As you may have heard, the State of California has told us that we can no longer have indoor public Masses in Sonoma County because the COVID-19 cases and death rates keep rising in Sonoma County. They have asked us to hold our Masses outside instead. We, of course, will comply.

One blessing in this decision by the state and county is that an outdoor Mass with everyone wearing a mask is safer than an indoor Mass, with the exception when the air quality is poor because of smoke from the local fires. Bishop Vasa has reminded us that the dispensation of the obligation to attend Sunday Mass is still in effect. Meaning, you are not obligated to come to Mass. I encourage you to stay at home if you feel any type of anxiety about attending a public gathering. Also, please do not come to Mass if you are feeling sick or have recently been sick, or if someone in your household is sick or has recently been sick. Furthermore, please do not feel obligated to come to Mass if you are in the high-risk groups for severe illness (e.g., immunocompromised, people with diabetes, older adults, people with asthma, HIV, liver disease, etc. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html>). You may not be worried of contracting the virus and dying from it but do worry of contracting the virus and causing someone else's death by exposing them to the virus. This is a pro-life issue. Please remember, there have not really been any medical advances in curing/treating the COVID-19 virus, so we have to be very cautious.

I want to remind you that just because we are dispensed from attending Mass of Sundays, we are not dispensed from keeping the Lord's Day holy. Please try to watch an online/televised Mass and dedicate some time of the day to prayer and reading the daily readings.

We will continue with the schedule that we have been utilizing, which consist of two Masses per weekend and follow our livestream schedule. The English Mass will be at 4:00 pm on Saturdays and the Spanish Mass will be at 11:00 am on Sundays. All of our weekend Masses will continue to be livestreamed, so you will still be allowed to watch them from your homes.

Outdoor public Masses at St. Joseph's will have strict requirements that everyone must follow:

1. If you or someone in your household has tested positive for the COVID-19 virus, please do not come to Mass until you and they have tested negative for the virus.
 - a. If you have had direct contact with someone who has the COVID-19 virus, please do not come to Mass until you have been tested and are given your results that state that you do not have the virus.

- b. If you have been tested for the COVID-19 virus please stay home until your test results state that you do not have the virus.
 - c. Please remember that some people who have the COVID-19 virus do not have symptoms, but they can still spread it to others.
 - d. If you have travelled outside of the country, please do not come to Mass for at least 14 days after returning and are symptom free.
2. You can only attend Mass if you have reserved a place for Mass.
 - a. You will have to call the parish office reservation extension for reservations: 707-795-4807 extension 103. Or you can email your reservation to sjccotati2020@gmail.com.
 - a. When calling/emailing please state your full name, your complete phone number and the total number of people who will be coming with you and the date and time of the Mass you wish to attend.
3. Masses will be held near the barbecue area of the parish grounds outside the parish hall.
 - a. The driveway entrance near the parish hall will be closed off.
 - b. Please remember to maintain a safe social distance from each other or other groups, especially getting out your vehicles.
 - c. The sanctuary will be on the walkway outside the parish hall.
 - d. The people can sit in the designated areas in the driveway below or in the picnic area.
 - e. Everyone will need to sit at least six feet apart from each other.
 - a. Families and people who live in the same household can sit as a group.
 - f. You will need to bring your own chair.
 - a. You might also want to bring an umbrella to protect you from the sun/rain.
 - b. Please know that it may also get pretty windy.
 - g. Although children are welcome to attend please keep them with your group.
 - a. Although we are outside, kindly remind the children that they are not in a park.
4. Everyone who comes to Mass will have to wear a mask.
 - a. Your mask will need to cover your mouth and nose at all times.
 - a. Please do not remove your masks at any time.
 - b. The only exception will be for receiving Holy Communion.
 - b. Remember that the basic masks do not protect you from the germs of others, it protects others from you spreading your germs.
 - c. The only exception will be the celebrant priest and the limited number of acolytes/ministers, only while in the sanctuary.
 - a. Those of us in the sanctuary will keep a very safe distance from each other in order to accomplish this
 - b. If the deacon is present, he will also serve as lector. If not, a lector will be assigned.
5. You will have to check in with the greeter who will be in the parking lot near the cones on the north end of the picnic area.
 - a. PLEASE ONLY ENTER THROUGH THE "CHECK-IN" AREA, not through W. Cotati Ave.
 - b. The greeter will take your temperature with a touchless thermometer and you will be asked if you attest that you are symptom free.
 - c. If you do not have a fever and are symptom free you will be allowed in.
6. There will be a basket near the greeters for you to place your offering as you enter. Please do this before Mass.

- a. There will be hand sanitizer available near the collection baskets for you to use before Mass.
 - b. You can also mail your offering to the parish office.
 - c. Please consider using our online giving system found on the parish website sjccotati.org.
 - d. Thank you for your generosity.
7. An usher will guide you to the area where you will sit for the duration of the Mass.
 8. Please know that there are no restrooms outside, and no one may enter the parish hall.
 9. Since we will be video recording Masses for people to watch from their homes, we will not be able to sing hymns because we do not have a license to use the hymns over a broadcast.
 - a. "Choirs and singing should be avoided, as they are likely a high aerosol generating activity that could spread COVID-19 or other viruses." (From the document *ROAD MAP TO Re-Opening Our Catholic Churches Safely*)
 - a. We have also been told by the state of California, as of July 6, that we cannot sing inside the building anymore because of this reason and Bishop Vasa has asked us to follow the same rule for outdoor Masses.
 - b. Keeping the above in mind, when saying your responses to the Mass it is preferred that you do not raise your voice.
 10. We will distribute Holy Communion during Mass in the following manner:
 - a. The priest or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion will come to the area where you are located, and we will be wearing our masks.
 - a. We will be accompanied by an usher who will spray your hands with fast drying hand sanitizer.
 - b. Holy Communion will only be distributed on the hand.
 - c. Please remove your mask to receive Holy Communion and consume the host in front of the priest or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion.
 11. Even though we are outdoors everyone will have to leave at the end of Mass.
 - a. An usher will hand you a bulletin to take home on your way out.
 - b. In order to maintain a safe social distance, the ushers will dismiss people.
 - a. Please DO NOT leave until an usher dismisses you.
 - c. Please remember to maintain a safe social distance from each other or other groups, especially getting into your vehicles.

I know that some of this may sound extreme, but we are living in a very different environment now. Let's err on the side of caution rather than risk contributing to the rise of this pandemic. I thank you all for your patience, understanding, cooperation and support as we begin our reopening for public Masses.

Your Servant in Christ,

Fr. Raúl Lemus,
Pastor
St. Joseph's Church