



**SAINT STEPHEN
BYZANTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH
90 BETHEL ROAD
NORTH HUNTINGDON, PA. 15642**

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Dear Members of St Stephen Parish Family,

As we approach the great Feast of Pentecost, the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, I greet you and pray that you are all well and still coping with life in these times of confusion, restrictions, uncertainties and conflicting types of guidance. It is not unlike the early Church who experienced so many of their former ways of life upended, traditions called into question, confusing guidance, all in light of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It was into this life situation that Jesus fulfilled his promise and sent the Holy Spirit upon this fledgling community. It is the Spirit of peace and unity, the Spirit of wisdom and guidance, the Spirit of prudence and understanding. There are many more gifts that the Spirit brings, and that is what we celebrate on this holy feast. May this same Spirit of God guide us through these uncertain times.

I would like to offer some guidance and reflections on our parish as we plan to re-open for public Divine Worship this weekend, at least on a limited basis. But first of all, I have some sad news to share.

Longtime members of St Stephen Church may remember **Sophie Panzo**, a former parishioner who fell asleep in the Lord this past week at age 100. Her funeral will take place on Monday, 1 June at 10:00 am. at St Stephen Church. Due to current restrictions, the family will arrange for invitations to attend.

I just received the sad news, that after a long period of suffering, **Susan Sabol**, the wife of Jack Sabol fell asleep in the Lord early Thursday evening. Sue had been an active member of our parish and an absolutely faithful participant at just about every liturgical service and parish project when she was in good health. We will miss her deeply. We also offer sincere condolences to her husband Jack who has been her constant and faithful companion through the long ordeal of her suffering and in death. Due to current circumstances, the funeral will be private. *Eternal Memory!*

Let us all continue to remember those who are ill at this time and those who are suffering in any way. The Parish Prayer List will resume in the Sunday bulletin this week. Let us be particularly attentive in our prayer to the over 100,000 fellow Americans who have died due to Covid-19. Their families and loved ones who are suffering so much also need to be remembered, especially those who were denied the privilege to be present during their time of suffering and death. May God's Spirit of comfort be with them at this time.

RE-OPENING THE CHURCH FOR DIVINE WORSHIP

Live Streaming

We will continue to live stream the Divine Liturgy on the parish Facebook site each Sunday at 10:30 am. This will not only be a service to those who are permanently home-bound, but it will also benefit those who are not yet ready to participate in the Services because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Please note that if you are not comfortable joining in congregational worship, you are under no obligation to do so at this time. Of course, this does not dispense you from your duty to pray regularly each day, and hopefully the streaming of the Liturgy will be a help to your own prayer.

Precautions

Even though there is a gradual re-opening in our region, the seriousness of this health crisis is far from over. We all need to be aware of and follow carefully all the safety measures that are given to us by the medical and scientific communities. This includes frequent hand-washing, use of hand sanitizers, maintaining social distance, wearing a mask when out of the house, and using common sense and prudence in all things.

Sanitizing

As has been announced in previous parish notes, the carpets have all been cleaned and Scotch-guarded recently and the entire church has been professionally deep-cleaned and sanitized. All the books, pamphlets, etc. have been removed from the pews. Groups of volunteers have been organized to help wipe down the pews, door handles, restrooms, all surfaces that are regularly touched. Hand sanitizers have been placed at the entrances to the church, and we ask you to use them each time you enter and exit the church.

Seating in Church

Following the guidelines given to us by our Archeparchy (and those in place throughout the country), we have carefully measured our church and have closed off every other pew. They are marked with a **BLUE “x”** indicating that these pews are not to be used.

In the pews that we are using, there is room for one person at each end and one in the middle. In the case of couples, families and those living in the same household, of course you may all sit together rather easily.

Now for the “biggie.” I saved the best for last! Since we are both social distancing and live streaming the Liturgy, we don’t want to have everyone in the back of the church. So there will be folks that I have asked to usher the people into the seats as you enter the church so that we may avoid any confusion. So, yes, at this time you may not be able to use “your pew” as usual.

We will begin to fill the church from front to back. And the ushers have been instructed on the proper manner of filling the pews while using the proper spacing between the faithful. With the co-operation of all, we should be able to do all this without confusion.

Remember, our primary purpose in doing all this is for the safety of all and so that we may worship and pray in peace.

Face Masks

Face masks during all public Divine Services are required by our Archeparchy. *There are no exceptions.* If you do not have one, a face mask will be provided as you enter the church. I will be wearing one during the Rite of Preparation and also for the distribution of the Eucharist.

As we have learned from the medical and scientific experts, the wearing of face masks protects everyone around us from one of the main transmitters of the virus, namely the ejection of minute droplets of saliva of which most of us are not aware. Thus the wearing of masks is an act of *respect for others*, an act of *charity* to our neighbors and a sign of *deep Christian reverence* for the image of God in others.

Liturgical Singing

Congregational singing has always been a mark of our Ruthenian Tradition. Most people in our parishes love to sing, and singing with full voice and heart is one of the ways in which we express our faith and love of God. However, at this time, we are told by singers that such singing is a “super spreader” of the virus. Therefore, we are asked not to sing out loudly. A soft joining in behind our masks will now be in order, and the cantors will carry the responses. The pews in front of the cantor’s stand have been cordoned off, and so this adds another measure of protection. Of course, you will all want to be as close to the front as possible anyway!!!

Collections

Collection baskets will not be used during the Liturgy. They will be placed at the doors when you exit. Of course, it is still appropriate to mail your donations as you have been doing. Once again, I am grateful to all those who have been so generous in this time of difficult circumstances.

Holy Communion

Instructions for the reception of Holy Communion will be given at each Divine Liturgy so that there will be no confusion. This is an intimate moment in the Liturgy, and we do not want to make it a point of uncertainty or misunderstanding. It will be done with utmost reverence and respect, and it will allow for personal concerns to be honored.

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Dear parishioners, I hope that this information and these guidelines will allay some of the concerns that you may have. It is my fervent hope and prayer that we can gradually begin to open our church in a peaceful and reverent manner without undo apprehensions from the faithful.

If you have any questions or concerns, please be free to contact me.

Let us continue to work together and pray together for the up-building of our parish family and for the well-being of each. May the Holy Spirit guide us in all our endeavors, and may we all open our hearts to the presence of our God who is with us.

May God be with you!

Fr John