



Dear Friends,

“When will you open the church?” I get that a lot these days. People are rightfully anxious to open the churches. We need to get back together; we’re *supposed* to be together. I called upon parishioners to volunteer for one of the 3 teams that will make opening possible. Thanks to one and all who rose to the challenge and signed up. Because of you, our parish is now open for Phase I. Phase IA should quickly follow and I’m hoping to get to Phase II in a few weeks.

I’m as anxious as anyone to open the church doors. When I tape a Mass, I see only the camera crew and their equipment, two musicians and a lector. That’s it. So, when I say, “The Lord be with you,” I hear 3 solitary voices from 3 different places in the church (the camera crew doesn’t respond) instead of the chorus of voices that I’m used to hearing. And I am expected to talk to a camera...an unresponsive machine! I now have a healthy respect for TV newscasters and actors who speak to us through cameras and have no audience in front of them.

I have also come to appreciate the presence of the People of God a lot more. An empty church has no life. It’s just an empty building. I miss the feel of the people; the hum of folks talking to each other, the shuffling, the coughing, the faces and voices of God’s people. How dead the building is without you! With no people to pray with me at Mass, I question what I’m doing. So, I am anxious to get the doors open and everyone back together as we should be, as we were called to be.

What’s standing in the way? As I’ve mentioned before, we have been given rules and regulations by the Vicar General, Bp. Hicks, that we have to follow. These rules and regulations are based on those handed down by the Governor and State health officials. These rules attempt to provide us with the best situation to come together safely. But fulfilling all these rules requires a lot of people.

We have 3 things we need to be done: 1.) gather all that’s necessary to open and maintain a sanitized worship space; 2.) form a group who will act as ushers under new circumstances; and 3.) clean up every time the space is used. Enough have signed up as of this writing to *begin the process of opening up one church*. While I am very grateful for these folks, we need many more. We have to plan on having these groups around for the long haul, which could mean for an entire calendar year! That’s a lot of getting supplies, ushering the people around and cleaning...*before, during and after every Baptism, Reconciliation, Wedding, Funeral and Mass in the church.*

We need lots of help if we are going to do this for a year!

As you can imagine no one wants to be on call for every church service from now until next July. So, we need **lots of people** at both worship sites to sign up on the Sign-up Genius and share the burden. The

more the better. Ideally, I wish every member of our community would sign up which would make sanitizing a piece of cake. However, the helpers we need have to meet qualifications: under 65 with no medical issues (asthma, recent surgery, lung issues). As you know the elders of the parish do a lot of the volunteering. In this case they can't. That means if you younger folks don't step up; the work won't be done and the church won't open - or remain open - if those who have volunteered become burned out. **I'm calling on the younger generations to step up to this challenge.** The more folks who sign up for the 3 teams the faster and easier this process will be. We now have trained people in place who have some experience under their belts. They can teach all who volunteer.

I have been preaching a call to discipleship for the past year and longer. Discipleship is all about serving the needs of others following the call of Jesus and with his help. I have watched the younger generation step up for the change needed in our nation. I am proud of those of you who have done that. Mother Teresa of Calcutta often said, charity begins at home. Our parish family needs to come back together again to celebrate our faith but can't because of this pandemic. Now is the time for you, the younger generation, to step up and serve the people of our parish. The torch must be passed to you now, since we elders literally can't do it.

In our country we have a reputation for folks coming together when there is a community need. This is one of those times. Please pray for guidance and listen for the Holy Spirit's response. Then, follow your heart. Your people need you.

Fr. Denis