

Dear Father,

We want to share with you the latest information related to the Pandemic and its impact on our liturgical celebrations. As per the latest orders from Governor Baker, there are a few modifications to the Phase 3 Step 1 that we are currently in:

State Update from Governor Baker's Office: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/temporary-capacity-and-gathering-limits>

- Effective 12:01 a.m. on 12/26, Places of Worship are **NOW RESTRICTED to a 25% capacity**. (We were originally 40% in Phase 3 step 1).
- All indoor office space is restricted to **25% capacity**. **There used to be a distinction between "open office" and closed office space, but that does not seem to be the case any longer.**
- Outside Gatherings are reduced to **25 people**. We have contacted the Governor's office for clarification about how this may apply to an outside Mass (which some parishes are still offering). We see no issue with families sitting in their vehicles for Mass.
- Fines now may be written at \$500 for EACH individual who is OVER the limit

We also want to use this opportunity to remind all pastors and parish staff of the guidelines put in place in May when we reopened the churches. These are still in effect today and because the numbers of cases of Covid-19 keep increasing, strict observance of these guidelines is expected. Here is a reminder of some of the highlights of those guidelines. Please refer to rest of the guidelines sent to you last May:

- Not having choirs.
- The need to take down the contact information of every individual or family attending Mass.
- The need for all liturgical ministers to keep their masks on when not reading aloud or leading prayers.
- The use of registration tools to limit capacity and for contact tracing.
- Use of face masks/coverings is mandatory by all attending, unless unable because of a medical condition or under the age 2.
- Altar servers are strongly discouraged.
- There is to be no Sign of Peace at this time.
- Priests and Extraordinary Ministers [if needed] must wear masks while they are distributing Holy Communion.
- During this period of health concern, in order to avoid a greater risk of contamination, communion should be given only in the hand and not on the tongue.

This continues to be an evolving and frustrating situation that we all thought would be over by now. It's even more challenging to reverse course now that our parishioners have become more comfortable in returning. We pray that this ends soon in 2021 with the introduction of a vaccine.