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9-2021

St. Kevin Church in Warwick During Covid

Katayoun Alidadi

Father Robert Marciano

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FOCUS ON ST. KEVIN CHURCH



Sunday worship at St. Kevin Church on Father's Day, 20 June 2021



Receiving Communion is a key part of the worship experience. Some parishioners continued wearing a mask even after the CDC changed its guidance for fully vaccinated people.

IN WARWICK DURING COVID

CAPACITY

Considering the capacity of the Church building (900), the restrictions on capacity (25% after 30 May 2020) were not a problem. // We didn't count. At some Churches you had to call for reservations, but we didn't have to do that! //

St. Kevin is a vibrant Church community. When we attended Mass on Father's Day on 20 June 2021, more than 300 people attended at 8 am alone. Father Marciano notes that the Church draws a big crowd. For instance, Christmas Mass draws a thousand people, but in 2020 it was small.

// People did exactly what they were told, they self-distanced, they wore masks. We had no alterations. Just one incident. Even now I notice they still space out a little, are very conscious. Some people still wear masks because of their own health concerns. People were staying home to be safe, and not only the elderly. One of our members just came back last week, a young lady super sensitive about the virus! //

FUNERALS AND HUGS

// We were so restricted on funerals. It was 5 people, but that did not impact the Church because I could have 25%. I called all the funeral homes and said if you need a place for your funerals bring them here. You don't have to be Catholic; I won't charge you. Here, families could space out. They would bring the body here, have the wake here. The funeral home would direct the people; you couldn't touch, but you could at least see the family. If you had a mom with 5 kids, one would have to sit in the car, and that is just not right. At every funeral I preached that 'social distancing is not practiced in heaven, it's all about hugs. I even had a Chinese Mandarin funeral here on a Sunday night, it was fascinating. They were so grateful that a Catholic priest would open up the Church for their use to help console the family! //

Has the virtual transformed worship?

// In the sense that we have an apparatus that we can flip a switch, for a wedding or funeral and live stream which is very advantageous if family is partly broad. We've learned some new things and technology has pushed its way into the Church. Some pastors have been ahead of that, with cameras in their Church and live streaming, but I never got that because I didn't need it! //

What have you learned from this pandemic?

// I've learned how resilient people are, and how kind, considerate, flexible they are. When everybody started coming back, I had people crying in Mass. They missed going to communion, because it is a spiritually journey. So, when you cut that out of your life for a year... I'm privileged that I can say Mass and receive Eucharist, but we couldn't even visit hospitals. That was very difficult, not being able to visit and console the family! //



Father Robert Marciano and Deacon John Fulton at the altar

INTINCTION

The Eucharistic practice whereby the communicant partly dips the consecrated bread, or host, into the consecrated wine before consumption.

Some Anglican Churches give the communicant the choice of drinking from the chalice (goblet) or receiving by intinction, but Catholic Churches do not use intinction.

Catholic theology is that the bread and wine is transformed into the body and blood of Christ. This is called transubstantiation, as opposed to consubstantiation.

// That's why the bells ring when my hands went over the elements. When the priest puts his hands over the elements, the Holy Spirit transforms the bread and the wine, and that is why we lock up the host in the tabernacle. It has all the attributes of bread, but the essentials have changed to the body of Christ. Because Catholics believe that's the precious blood, we wouldn't want that to drop off of anything and it could drop off the host! //

// That's why Catholics don't have open communion, we don't offer communion to non-Catholics. Not that they are bad people and we are good people, but Communion means that you are in communion, that your beliefs are the same. //

// We learned a lot, I think the word is resilience. Catholics are resilient and our faith is strong. My Hendricken message was COVID is strong, but we are stronger! //

—Father Robert Marciano

Father Robert Marciano is a tireless and cheerful priest who wears many hats. He is pastor of St. Kevin and St. Benedict Churches as well as the president of Bishop Hendricken High School in Warwick. A retired Lieutenant Colonel and Chaplain in the Air National Guard, Father Marciano has served as Chaplain of the Warwick Police and Fire Departments. In his many roles, he is no stranger to crisis management, having ministered those in the Pentagon immediately following the attacks of 9/11.

Dr. Katayoun Alidadi

September 2021

Father Marciano received an early and abrupt wake-up call to the COVID-19 pandemic, having to quarantine in March 2020 when a student at St. Kevin's school notified his teachers that his mother 'had that flu'.

// After investigating, the Department of Health quarantined all of us. The priests, the kids, the parents, the teachers, some 70 people. We were two weeks locked in. That was the beginning of the pandemic. And then the State shut us down, Churches were mandated to close! //

THE NEW NORMAL

After a brief pause in his activities, father Marciano worked with his team to say Mass in what would become the new normal.

// During the pandemic I was doing virtual Masses, some pastors did nothing. They just stayed closed. That wasn't received well by the people; they would go somewhere else. Those folks migrated to another Church where the pastor said Mass virtually. We had weekday Masses the whole time! //

// I was saying Mass in the school chapel. We filmed on Saturday morning and put it on our webpage so people could watch. Then that got more sophisticated. We installed a camera system. On our website you can see we have a camera system we now use to live stream weddings, funerals! //

// At the beginning when we first opened the Church up, we taped the pews off. We sprayed the Church after every Mass. We bought a machine to fog the pews. We got rid of all the missalettes, there are no hymnals. We are going to buy new ones. The old ones were recycled. We couldn't disinfect because people would handle them between Masses. That's how crazy it was, they were saying the virus would stay on surfaces up to 2 hours. We were live streaming Sunday Mass at 10 am until the Bishop on June 6 [2021] restored the obligation to attend Mass and we shut it off! //



We hope you enjoyed learning about religious worship in Rhode Island during the COVID-19 pandemic. Feel free to reach out to Professor Alidadi, principal investigator, at kalidadi@bryant.edu