

Saint Ann's Solemn Novena will be held, with changes

Safety measures to be emphasized during 96th annual spiritual pilgrimage

SCRANTON – Even the Solemn Novena to Saint Ann cannot escape the unprecedented impact the coronavirus pandemic has had on the rest of the world.

This summer's annual Saint Ann Novena – the 96th consecutive in its storied history – will still be offered, but it promises to be a significantly scaled-back version of its original self.

Every mid-July for nearly a century, faithful followers of the venerated Saint are drawn by the thousands to the Catholic Church's only national shrine and basilica church dedicated to the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary and grandmother of Jesus – located high atop the hill on Saint Ann Street in Scranton's West Side.

Devotees of "Good Saint Ann" will once pilgrimage to their favorite destination next month; however, the annual ten-day religious experience will be like no other during the Solemn Novena, beginning on Friday, July 17, and continuing each day until the devotion's faith-filled conclusion on the Feast of Saint Ann on Sunday, July 26.

According to Very Rev. Passionist Father Richard Burke, rector of the Saint Ann Passionist Monastery and director of the Basilica of the National Shrine of Saint Ann, planning for the Solemn Novena has also required a great many conversations, discussions and decisions.

"This year, those consultations were multiplied by a factor of ten," he said, referring to the worldwide COVID-19 health crisis.

Ultimately, the priest commented, the wearisome ride set in motion back in March led to this month's upgrade in reopening allowances and a new set of precautionary guidelines from both the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Diocese of Scranton.

"After all, we decided that we could have an in-person Novena for a good number of people," said Father Burke, who also serves as pastor of Saint Ann Basilica Parish.

The Passionist superior is encouraged by how well the first gatherings of prayer in three months have unfolded at the Basilica parish, indicating the



Left: All Masses at this year's Solemn Novena to Saint Ann will take place indoors. Father Richard Burke, C.P., left, Brother Andre Mathieu, C.P., center, and Father Siby John Padinjaredath, right, discuss how the distribution of Holy Communion will take place.

Above: Visitors to the Basilica of the National Shrine of Saint Ann will notice a number of changes at this year's pilgrimage, set to take place from July 17-26. Father Richard Burke, C.P., points to a sign which says face masks will be required.

popular weekly Monday Novena to Saint Ann resumed at the shrine on June 22.

"We have spent a great deal of time creating the changed atmosphere and schedule of services that will enable us all to pray fervently and pray safely during the Solemn Novena," Father Burke said.

The changes that will be put in place to adhere to current restrictions and protocols for public gatherings include the required designation for seating to comply with social distancing guidelines. That translates into the Basilica now allowing a maximum of just 135 faithful at a time, where it normally can accommodate a congregation of nearly 1,000.

Hand-sanitizing stations have been installed throughout, and congregants are requested to enter the Basilica through one front door and leave by way of an "exit only" door.

Other noticeable changes for the 2020 Solemn Novena are as follows:

- All Masses and services will be held indoors, as opposed to the traditional practice of holding three of the five daily services outdoors.

- Due to the need to sanitize the Basilica after each service, the 7:30 p.m. Mass and Novena service have been eliminated,

except for the Solemn Closing of the Novena on the Feast of Saint Ann, when Bishop Joseph C. Bambera will celebrate the concluding liturgy on July 26 at 7:30 p.m.

- Daily afternoon Eucharistic Adoration is cancelled, in order to properly sanitize after the 11:45 a.m. Mass and Novena, and all-night Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is suspended.

- The Novena's annual Healing Mass with the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick and the Mass for children and grandparents will not be held.

- Only a general blessing of the faithful with the relic of Saint Ann will be imparted. No individual blessings with the relic will be offered.

- Traditional tents and chairs in the Basilica's front parking lot will not be set up. Stay-in-your-vehicle parking will be available throughout the front and immediate back parking lots, with all services broadcast over a sound system that can be accessed through FM radio. Communion will be brought to those in their cars.

- Holy Communion will be distributed at the very end of all Masses, and upon receiving, all communicants are required to leave by the exit door immediately.

- Confessions will be

available on a limited basis, with the sacrament being offered only every other day of the Novena. All confessions will be held for 45 minutes only in the Lower Basilica before the celebration of Masses and the 3:30 p.m. services. Social-distancing guidelines will be in place.

- Unlike years past, the traditional Saint Ann Novena food stand will not be open on the Basilica grounds.

- Protective facial masks/coverings are required of all those in attendance at all times, including inside the Basilica, in the confessionals, and within the Shrine Center.

Father Burke added that those attending the Novena will be allowed to sit on the many benches around the Basilica property, since they are spaced sufficiently to provide for safe social distancing.

"Our Saint Ann devotees will definitely notice the changes required for safety from the coronavirus," Father said, emphasizing that although the faithful are gradually returning to church, the pandemic is still very present and must be respected. "We consider it a blessing that we are able to provide a safe environment for us to come together to pray to Saint Ann here at the Basilica. So long as we all maintain our vigilance, we will be able to pray

fervently and safely together."

He also referred to the recommendation of Bishop Bambera that the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions should consider remaining in the safety of their homes and participate in the Novena devotions through broadcasts by Catholic Television (CTV).

"The Solemn Novena in honor of Saint Ann evokes memories of parents, grandparents and cherished family traditions for so many people who participate each year," Bishop Bambera remarked. "Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have all faced many difficult and challenging days, but it our faith that gives us a reason to move forward in the midst of struggle."

For more information on the 96th Solemn Novena to Saint Ann, visit:

stannsmonasterybasilica.org

or

St. Ann Monastery Basilica Parish Facebook Page