



May 28, 2021

To the St. Michael Parish Community,

The recent announcement from the CDC regarding issues of mask wearing and social distancing was, I know, a big source of relief and excitement for us all. Two weeks ago, I made an announcement about what we anticipated the plan for worship would be in the coming weeks and months. Recent news obviously means those plans had to be reconsidered, which is certainly a good thing. However, they cannot be rethought on a dime, in large measure because there are a number of 'moving parts'. The issue of the fact that not everyone in our community has been vaccinated, either partially or at all, is a more sensitive one, and one I wanted to take some time to think about, after consultation with parish staff and others.

Here's what I have decided:

- As of next weekend, we will not be asking those who have been fully vaccinated (received their full dosage at least 14 days ago) to wear masks any longer- but they are welcome to continue wearing them if they want to. Those who are not vaccinated, or have not yet reached full immunity, are recommended to continue to wear a mask.
- We will 'open' the main body for sitting where you like, but we will keep the East Transept as it currently is, with more than the usual room between rows; we will also keep seating in the Gathering Space.
- And, although I am fully vaccinated, I will continue to wear a mask to distribute communion, and I will ask our Eucharistic Ministers to do the same.
- We will gradually be adding back more elements of our "usual" worship practices.
 - In coming weeks, you will see our choir gradually coming back in larger numbers, with the hope to be back at full strength late in the summer.
 - We will be resuming the use of at least one altar server at each Mass.
 - We will be having two lectors and additional Eucharistic ministers for Sunday Mass.
 - There will be an opening procession with the presiding priest, lectors, and the server carrying the cross.

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- We will be placing hymnals in the pews. If you are more comfortable with the individual worship aids, you are welcome to download the worship aid-which will continue to be on the website each week-on your phone or tablet.
- In the coming weeks, we will return to having a procession with the gifts at the offertory.
- We will not be sanitizing the pews after each Mass. (We realize how much they have deteriorated-we are working on finding ways to restore them.)

As we gradually return to our formerly normal practices, I would ask all of us to consider the safety of our young people. Those between the ages of 12-15 have only just recently become eligible for the vaccine; none of them have had enough time to reach full immunity. Those 11 and younger are not yet even eligible. Please consider leaving a bit more room around families with children, and offer support to the children who will still need to wear masks. And you might even think about putting yours back on for those occasions when you are with or near young people.

Finally, let me say that the decision to come to Mass is one that each family will have to consider on their own. Though the obligation to attend Mass is being reinstated as of the weekend of June 5 & 6, the bishops note that those who are ill, have compromised immune systems, their caregivers, as well as those who have significant anxiety about returning to worship are not obliged. The pandemic is by no means over; people are still contracting the virus. Everyone must be led by their own conscience and sense of safety and comfort. No judgments of any kind will be made about the decision you make for yourself about when it feels safe to return.

I am very much looking forward to a fuller resumption of our Eucharistic celebrations, so very much at the heart of who we are as a Catholic people. May this summer be a time of growing in our belief in Christ's presence not only in the Word proclaimed, but especially in the Body and Blood that we receive!

In Christ,

Fr. Ed Burns