

May 25, 2021

Dear Friends,

As we continue our daily lives and return to normalcy or the new “normal,” or whatever current buzzword is being used during these unprecedented times (I have really become a repetitious word snob), I wanted to keep you updated on changes being implemented at St. Matthew’s. Earlier today, I received a suggested list of guidelines from the Diocese of Paterson, with a finalized and perhaps expanded version coming out on Thursday. While there could be additions or amendments, my guess is that they will be specific to liturgical elements.

Since we reopened our doors, my commitment to all of you has been to make you feel as comfortable in your worship as possible. This commitment will not change. We are a diverse community. I will continue to find balance that must exist for all of us to be comfortable and safe as we navigate changes post pandemic. With the easing of mask and social distancing rules (for those who have been fully vaccinated), there will be notable changes this weekend.

Before discussing changes at St. Matthew’s, I want to call to mind the first scripture verse that popped into my head as I began to write this letter. Matthew 25:40, which is part of the parable on the Judgment of Nations, says “And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’” Right now, as much as we want to think about OUR wants and needs, we must think about everyone in our community, especially those in our parish. We cannot turn a blind eye to others because we don’t want to be inconvenienced. Why the pandemic became such a divisive thing confuses me, especially in light of our own Baptism. Please remember this as we move forward. My choices and policies are trying to find balance to welcome everyone to the table of the Lord.

First and foremost, the requirement to wear a mask to mass will be lifted for those who are fully vaccinated. If you have yet to get vaccinated, please try to get the vaccine as soon as possible. If you are not vaccinated, please wear your mask to mass. If you are fully vaccinated but would feel more comfortable wearing a mask indoors, please feel free to do so. You will not be judged should you desire to wear a mask indoors. Note that our HVAC system has Merv-13 air filters and UV lights to help combat airborne viral agents. For the safety of all, when it comes time to receive the Blessed Sacrament, all deacons, Eucharistic Ministers and myself will continue to sanitize our hands and wear a mask.

While social distancing guidance has been lifted for indoor venues, we will continue to keep the section of pews closest to the tabernacle roped off as they have been since we reopened last year. Please continue to only sit in the designated, non-roped off areas as we have been doing. Regarding some of the other questions you may have, I am working to get answers regarding singing,

Holy Water, etc. As new guidelines are expected on Thursday, 5/27/21, we hope these questions will be answered.

Lastly, the Bishops of the State of New Jersey and the Providence of Newark have lifted the dispensation for coming to Mass. With dispensation being lifted, remember that we as Catholics have been called to keep holy the Sabbath. We should be coming to mass on a weekly basis. If you are sick, unwell, etc., you may obviously exercise judgment and stay home. Currently, there are no plans to stop streaming of the 8:00 am daily mass. Weekend masses will continue to be streamed at 5:00 pm on Saturday and 9:30 am on Sunday. Note that before the changes we are currently seeing, I was planning on stopping the 11:00 am mass stream as most people were watching the other two masses.

I am excited that we are beginning to see the light at the end of the pandemic. Please continue to exercise good judgment and decision making when it comes to our policies. Please think of those who are sick or unable to be vaccinated. Please leave judgment at the door and do what is best for all members of the St. Matthew's Parish community.

God Bless,
Fr. Brian