



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Grace and Peace to you in Jesus our Lord.

I haven't written a new edition of "the Pastor's Heart" in quite a while. I am writing this to update everyone about our new guidelines for attending mass. More and more people are returning to church. We are not quite back to normal, but we are slowly getting there. I made an announcement a few weeks ago describing the things about which I am now writing. I am sending this now to everyone so even the parishioners who have not yet returned to mass can know ahead of time what these changes are.

We have been locked out, socially distanced, limited in capacity and masked for fifteen months. It has been very hard. We have sought creative solutions to very real limitations – all with the intention to keep everyone safe. I am very grateful to everyone for their active engagement throughout this very difficult period.

Things are now changing. The CDC, the State of Michigan and the Archdiocese of Detroit have issued new guidelines in response to the many hopeful signs indicating we are through the worst of it.

The following is now the approach that we are following at Holy Family.

As your Pastor, I feel a heavy burden to protect our safety, the unity of our parish and a peaceful atmosphere in Church. And, some restrictions are easing. I know the development of vaccines, their safety and/or effectiveness is a matter of great debate and disagreement. I believe and defend the right of every person to follow their conscience. I understand it is a very personal decision. Following the recommendation of Archbishop Vigneron, I have chosen to be vaccinated. I understand that people are very passionate on both sides of the issue. About these things, I urge you to keep in mind that each of us is doing what we think is best for ourselves and our community.

After this weekend, those who have been vaccinated are no longer required to wear masks or practice social distancing in church. We are directed by the Archdiocese of Detroit **to designate safe areas in the Church for those who choose to continue to wear masks and be socially distanced.** We must do everything in our power to continue to protect the safety and confidence of everyone coming to Church. The two sections of pews on the north side of the Church, the choir side, **will continue to wear masks and maintain social distance.** In the rest of the Church, we have removed ropes and tape that block off rows of seating. These sections of the Church **will not be required to wear masks and maintain social distancing.** Many may still prefer to wear masks in this section also. They, of course, are free to do that. The south side (choir side) is **not required** to wear masks and maintain social distance. The north **is required** to wear masks and be socially distanced.

I am stating things very carefully. I am not saying the vaccinated on one side and the unvaccinated on the other side. I am not saying that on this side, we have the Hatfield's and on the other side we have the McCoy's. We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

I am saying that the new rules inform the vaccinated that they no longer need to wear masks. I am saying that we are told to designate areas of the Church for those who choose to continue wearing masks and social distancing. You can make those decisions in the sanctity of your conscience. I encourage us to be careful not to judge one another. To those who might be nervous because they want to know if everyone around them is vaccinated, I say this: to stay safe, to be protected, **is precisely the reason you got vaccinated.** If there is a risk, the risk is not to you, but to the other person.

Eucharistic Ministers are still required to wear masks for the distribution of Holy Communion. I am grateful to those who have been so patient with restricting communion to reception in the hand. Please feel free to now receive the Eucharist on your tongue if you choose to do so. We are directed that communion will still be under the one form of bread; we are not yet ready to share a common cup.

I pray that we experience this latest transition to something new keeping our eyes focused on what is most important. We are here to worship God. We are here to be equipped with more of the Holy Spirit. God wants his world back and we have signed up to help God do that. This is precious ground. This is what is most important.

Thank you. Pray for God's blessing and protection. This too will pass. Let us love one another, trust God and help God get his world back!

See you in church.

Your brother,

Fr. Bob