

SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Dear Parishioners,

As we all know, many changes have been made to COVID-19 safety protocols by our governing bodies in recent days. Father James Bissonette, our religious superior, has subsequently laid out a timeline in conjunction with those changes that specifically addresses what effect they have on our local practices at our parish. I wish to share those with you today to help clarify what you can expect at our parishes in the near future. I understand that this email is particularly long, but I ask you to please read it in full since it addresses what I believe are many questions that our parishioners may have about our practices in the future.

First, allow me to share with you the email letter that the clergy received from Father Bissonette yesterday regarding the lifting of the mask mandate in Minnesota:

"Dear Clergy,

I am writing to you in regard to recent changes in the COVID-19 Mask Mandate.

From the Centers for Disease Control: "Update that fully vaccinated people no longer need to wear a mask or physically distance in any setting, except where required by federal, state, local, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance." (May 13, 2021)

From the Office of MN Governor Walz: "Governor Tim Walz today announced the end of Minnesota's statewide mask requirement, aligning Minnesota with the new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance on face coverings. Minnesotans who are not fully vaccinated are strongly recommended to wear face coverings indoors." (Announced May 13, 2021; Effective May 14, 2021)

From the City of Duluth Communications Office: "Beginning today, the City will no longer enforce the mask ordinance...It is also important to remember the CDC's guidance on easing mask wearing is for fully vaccinated people, and that some business sectors and nonprofits are still required to wear masks within their spaces and may require the public to do the same." (May 14, 2021)

As you know, the recently adjusted Diocesan COVID-19 protocols state: "COVID-19 vaccination is strongly encouraged but not required for all who come to worship including priests, deacons, servers, lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, music ministers and ushers."

Given the above, beginning on **May 15/16, 2021**, the celebration of the Ascension of our Lord, those who come to worship may choose to wear a mask or may choose not to wear a mask.

Since we do not know who is vaccinated or who is not at our Masses, I ask that you follow the rest of the adjusted protocols (including safe distancing) until **May 28, 2021** and **July 1, 2021**.

Thank you for your continued cooperation with these important matters.

Rev. James Bissonette"

So, dear brothers and sisters, having addressed the question of mask-wearing at Mass and other Church functions, please note the following changes that will take place on the dates specified below, per our religious superior, and in accordance with decisions that I have made regarding matters that he left to each individual Pastor's discretion:

Effective the Weekend of May 22-23: Congregational singing will resume, and hymnals will be returned to the pews.

Effective Friday, May 28: Social distancing and congregation size limits will cease, which means:

- All ropes currently roping off certain pews for social distancing protocols will be removed.
- Holy water fonts will be returned and filled for use.
- The current technique for the distribution of Holy Communion during the pandemic (one side of the church at a time) will cease, and two lines for Holy Communion which are side-by-side in the center aisle will resume.
- The sacrament of confession will once again be celebrated in the confessional in the Church proper (no longer in the education center at Holy Spirit or the cry room at St. Mary's).
- Funeral luncheons, social gatherings and all other in-person meetings and activities at the parish may resume.

Practices that will remain in place after May 28, 2021:

- The obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains lifted until our Administrator or our Bishop reinstates it.
- The clergy and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion will continue to wear a mask while they are distributing Holy Communion to the faithful for the time being.
- Music at Mass will continue to be provided by a cantor or small schola who lead the singing.
- The distribution of Holy Communion under the species of the Consecrated Bread only will continue- the distribution of Holy Communion under the form of the Precious Blood will not resume yet.
- Hand sanitizer will continue to be available for parishioners' use, since we had this available for the convenience of parishioners before the pandemic began. However, there will not be as many sanitizing stations.
- The exchange of the Sign of Peace at Mass as commonly known previously- through the shaking of hands- will not resume yet.

On July 1, 2021:

- The use of a full choir for leading music at Mass can resume._
- The Sign of Peace during Mass will resume, to be exchanged at each parishioner's discretion._
- The Distribution of the Precious Blood may resume, provided that there are sufficient Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion prepared and scheduled, and that I have judged it prudent to do so.

A couple of important things to keep in mind:

We will be undertaking the resumption of several activities and practices at once, which may mean that I need to delay one practice or another (for example, the distribution of the Precious Blood at Mass) until the necessary preparations to do so reverently and well have been completed. I ask for your continued patience as bringing these parish practices and activities back online will take some planning and preparation during what is already a very busy time of the year for our parish staff.

1. I recognize that many people have different opinions and feelings about when to loosen restrictions, how to loosen them, etc. I ask for all of us to do the best that we can to be understanding of each other, especially of those whose opinion may be different from ours. I also welcome and encourage parishioners with questions and concerns to make them known to me by speaking with me directly or through phone or email.
2. Finally, I wish to thank all of you, the parishioners! You have often been asked to sacrifice a lot throughout this last year of the pandemic, even going without the public celebration of the Mass for two months. Your willingness to adapt and persevere in your faith is inspiring to me. Thank you for your continued prayers for those who have been sick, for those who have died and their families, and for our medical professionals. I am very much looking forward to what the coming months will bring!

As always, I will keep you posted on new updates to this timeline as I receive them. God bless you now and always!

Fr. Steve Laflamme