



DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

UPDATE ON WEARING MASKS/FACE COVERINGS

Many in our faith communities look forward to removing their masks as we make progress to overcome the pandemic. The Diocesan Committee on Reopening Churches continues to monitor the guidelines from the CDC and State of Illinois. At the same time, we recognize that less than 40% of adults in Illinois are fully vaccinated and there remains a risk of infection for many. Because of this, State and local authorities support the independent decisions of local establishments and organizations for their visitors.

During the liturgy we remain in one place, indoors, in proximity to others, for an extended period. These factors point to the need to take more precautions than we might take in many other public places. Considering this, the Diocesan Reopening Committee will continue to take a cautious approach during these next several weeks leading up to Phase 5 when we anticipate health department guidance to permit an even greater relaxation of mitigation efforts.

We understand and appreciate that some parishioners are very eager to remove their masks while others are more hesitant for many reasons (e.g., their community has experienced a higher incidence of COVID infections, the high risk to immune-compromised individuals, etc.).

Given this diversity, we came to the decision that ***all attendees at Masses and liturgies must continue to wear masks until we reach Phase 5*** (at which time it is expected that all mask mandates will be lifted).

This decision was made with the support and guidance of Bishop McGovern. From the beginning, we have operated with the health and safety of everyone in our community as the foremost priority. Collectively, we have lifted one another up in prayer and charity, adhered to protocols and guidelines, and committed to a unified approach to overcoming the challenges of the pandemic. It is with that spirit of unity that we continue to move forward.

At this time, other mitigation efforts are still in place—maintaining physical distance, sanitizing hands before the reception of Holy Communion, continuing reservations for contact tracing and sanitizing pews and any liturgical items used during Mass.

We understand that not all will be pleased with this decision. As always, we thank all parishes for their hard work to make the celebration of Mass and our liturgies beautiful and safe as we continue to manage within important health guidelines.

We anticipate changes in the coming weeks and will share updates as they become available.

From: Fr. John Iffert

Sent: Thursday, May 20, 2021 3:41 PM

Subject: Update on Wearing Masks/Face Coverings

Importance: High

Dear priests, deacons, retired priests, seminarians, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, women religious, and diocesan staff,

Good afternoon. May the Holy Spirit enkindle in us the fire of Divine Love!

Thank you for all you do to maintain the sacred liturgy and offer pastoral care to as many as possible during this pandemic.

An update from the Diocesan Reopening Committee is attached to this email. It clarifies that **the guideline requiring masks at all liturgies in the Diocese of Belleville remains in place** until our area enters Phase 5 of the Restore Illinois plan. This guidance was developed with Bishop McGovern's leadership and approval.

In developing this guidance, we have considered the national guidelines issued by the Center for Disease Control. We also considered the unique characteristics of our participation at Mass. During the liturgy, we are indoors, in proximity to others, and largely stationary for an extended period. Under this set of conditions, a charitable response to our neighbors who are most at risk calls for a greater exercise of caution than many other activities.

Pastors and Administrators, please share the attached update with parishioners in as many ways as reasonable. Please emphasize that we are asking the Faithful to remain patient a little longer as an act of kindness to our brothers and sisters who are most vulnerable.

Some people will be disappointed with this decision. They will disagree with our judgment about what is prudent in this situation. Please make every effort to encourage the disappointed and to support the work of ushers, volunteers, and parish staff who may endure those expressions of disappointment most directly.

Let us pray for one another. I've noticed that Fr. Mujule often prays for a new Pentecost. I make his prayer mine today. May the Spirit of Pentecost be renewed in us today and sustain us each day. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. John Iffert

The Very Reverend John C. Iffert

Vicar General

Diocese of Belleville