



May 6, 2021

Dear Rev. Frs., esteemed members of the parish councils and faithful.

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen! By the Grace of God our parishes were able to offer all the prescribed Lenten, Holy Week and Paschal services this year! Seeing our faithful returning to church is truly a blessing. Hopefully, this trend will continue as everyone who wants to get vaccinated is able to do so. We were not created to live in isolation, but to live in communion with one another.

Over the past month or so, both clergy and laity asked for updated guidelines related to mitigation measures in our parishes. Much has changed since the initial letters of May 6th and May 16th of 2020. Three different vaccines are now fully available. The medical field is more knowledgeable on effective treatments and we now know the virus is rarely if ever passed on through contact with surfaces, as it is air borne.ⁱ Additionally, the Wolf administration announced on May 4th that all mitigation orders are being lifted on Memorial Day with the exception of the mask mandate, which will be lifted once 70% of Pennsylvania adults are fully vaccinated.ⁱⁱ Finally, we also know one cannot become sick through ingesting the virus.ⁱⁱⁱ

We all have been traumatized by the events of the last year in one way or another.^{iv} Additionally, we are repeatedly traumatized through the barrage of news reports, directives and reminders, public service announcements, social media, healthcare networks, insurance companies, text messages, emails, as well as the plethora of signage, etc. One cannot escape hearing or seeing something about precautions multiple times a day. As the Church we do not want to be part of the ongoing traumatization, but be a place where we can find peace, healing and hope, resting our eyes and ears from the constant reminders which cause fear and anxiety.

We grieve those we have lost and pray for those mourning a loss of a loved one, as well as those suffering from loneliness, fear, anxiety, depression, isolation, substance abuse and despondency. We are blessed, however, that our faithful were *more than capable of taking adequate precautions* in their daily activities to protect themselves whether at home, the grocery store, restaurants, church or traveling, etc. While our Diocese did have a couple of funerals of the elderly associated with COVID 19, the number of funerals for 2020 was actually less than 2019 and consistent with the numbers over the last 5 years.^v

Given the availability of the vaccine, availability of effective treatments and our faithful's understanding and practice of proper protocols, as well as the constant reminders in the public sphere, I am making the following Archpastoral changes to our Diocesan Protocols out of love and care for the faithful:

1. Parishioners are no longer to be asked about COVID symptoms or have temperature checks at the parish. (*No parish has sent one parishioner home because of an elevated temperature. Our people understand not to come to church if they are sick.*)
2. All tape or barriers delineating social distancing is to be removed from the floors and pews. (*Our people already know what to do after a year of conditioning and other places have already removed them.*)
3. All barriers blocking pews are to be removed. (*The faithful are already making decisions regarding their comfort level and proximity apart from Church services and are able to do*



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“Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee.” Augustine

so when attending services. The airlines have people sitting shoulder to shoulder on their flights. People have been dining at restaurants where they sit for an hour or more without masks on.)

4. No one is required to wear *two masks* in any parish of the Diocese, nor are they to be told to do so. *(Twenty-five states have no masks requirements at all and that number will be increasing. The mandate within Pennsylvania and Delaware will also come to an end at some point.^{vi})*
5. Parishes are to begin using the communion cloth. The mouths should only be wiped if needed. *(If someone's mouth needs to be wiped another cloth should be available with one of those holding the cloth.)*
6. Council members must not be overly zealous in policing the faithful as they have already proven themselves responsible over the last year.
7. Parishes may begin to pass the offering basket if so desired.
8. Parish Halls are to be opened after services for those who would like time for fellowship. *(We can let people decide for themselves when they are ready, but we should not deny them the opportunity.)*

Dear to God, let us, as the Church provide the one place where the faithful are not traumatized through our words or what they see when attending services. Many businesses began this process months ago. May our Lord stretch forth His healing hand and help us to become whole.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

ⁱ The CDC has acknowledged the unnecessary overuse of sanitizers and concern with handling various surfaces.

<https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2021/coronavirus-surface-cleaning.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.media.pa.gov/Pages/Health-Details.aspx?newsid=1437>

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://www.consumerreports.org/food-safety/coronavirus-common-questions-about-the-food-you-eat-food-safety/>

^{iv} Understanding the impact of trauma

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/#:~:text=Initial%20reactions%20to%20trauma%20can,effective%2C%20and%20self%2Dlimited.>

Symptoms of Trauma

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/table/part1_ch3.t1/?report=objectonly

^v See the document, "Funerals by Parish in the last 5 Years."

^{vi} Governor Wolf is lifting all Covid restrictions except masks on Memorial Day.

https://www.wfmz.com/news/area/pennsylvania/pa-to-lift-all-covid-restrictions-except-mask-mandate-on-memorial-day/article_2f35a328-acf9-11eb-ad9f-43199baaa4ee.html