

# Fr. Bob's Blog

When I look back at our first month together as a combined parish I feel truly blessed and honored to have been chosen to be your pastor. I know that the only way I will be effective in that role is if we all work together to make the Catholic community of St. John DeLaSalle, Sts. Peter and Paul, and Holy Name of Mary not only a place that praises the Lord well through liturgy, but also a place that welcomes and accepts people regardless of where they came from or how they got here. To be a place that is open to new ideas while embracing tradition, a place where one never loses sight of the fact that the needs of the community may, at times, cause us to set our own needs aside. Together we can do so many great things, things far greater than any one of us, or any one parish, could do on its own. I know that these next few months will be an adjustment for all of us, and that is, in fact, a good thing as it will lead us to growth in ways we never thought possible.

To that end I feel the need to address a topic that is threatening to cause division at a time when we are trying to unite: our mandate requiring masks to be worn in church regardless of one's covid-19 vaccination status or personal beliefs. I realize that this mandate was lifted by the Archdiocese and subsequently by most parishes. When the mandate was lifted the members of the liturgy team and parish council of the former Holy Name of Mary Parish recommended continuing masking through Easter and re-evaluating at that point. I supported that decision. When Easter arrived and cases were on the rise the decision was made to continue masking, and continue to monitor the situation and re-evaluate when necessary. Prior to our three parishes becoming one new faith community on July 1 I met with leadership of all three parishes and we agreed to continue the mandate and re-evaluate on September 1<sup>st</sup>. In the first few weeks since we have come together it has become apparent to me that not all of the members of our faith community are on board with that decision, and I respect that. I am fully aware that some may feel that if the Archdiocese does not require wearing a mask, if an airline doesn't require wearing a mask, if a grocery store does not require wearing a mask, if a restaurant doesn't require wearing a mask, then why do we require it? I am also aware that for many members of our faith community who have had to leave a church building and parish they loved deeply, one that had dropped the mask mandate, to join this community, feel like they are now having someone else's rules forced on them. I know that wearing masks are not comfortable; cause's challenges with fogging of eyeglasses, sweating, speaking in way that one can be understood etc. I know none of us want to wear a mask anymore and we are tired of covid-19 and want to just be done with it. I pray we will be soon.

All of that being said I ask you to consider the following facts:

1. Covid-19 has is not gone away, it is still a very real virus and risk.
2. While it is true that far less people are being hospitalized and dying from the virus now than were in the early days of the pandemic, the number of positive cases are, in fact on the rise.
3. The CDC on July 22<sup>nd</sup> stated that 87% of all American's (including us in the Chicago area) now live in an area where masking should be done indoors regardless of vaccination status (see link below)
4. Our community has a large number of people who fall into the "high risk" category for catching Covid-19
5. Masking, while not completely preventing the spread, does help to reduce it.
6. Our combined leadership team did agree to continue masking until at least September 1st

It is for these reasons, as well as others, that after careful prayer and consideration I am making the decision to keep the mandate in place until at least September 1<sup>st</sup>, at which point it will be re-evaluated. While I respect everyone's choices and ability to make decisions based on what they feel is best for themselves and their family I must do what I feel is best for the community at large. Sometimes we are asked to make sacrifices for the good of others, and I am asking all of us to do that. I pray for day when covid-19 is a thing of the past, and truly believe we will get there. That day, however, is not today, and so I ask you all to bear with us for the time being. If asking you to wear a mask for mass is something that you decide is too difficult for you to comply with I respect your decision and I kindly invite you to join us on zoom or Facebook live for mass until such a time as we can safely lift the mandate. May God continue to bless you and keep you.

Peace Always,

Fr. Bob

<https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2022-07-22/cdc-87-of-americans-should-be-wearing-a-mask-indoors-or-considering-it?context=amp>