

Dear St. Mary Family,

I want to take a moment to discuss the issue of wearing masks at Mass here at St. Mary. Many parishioners are struggling with the current policy of constant mask wearing at Mass. In fact, a significant number of people have stopped coming to St. Mary over this issue.

We understand the other side of this issue—there are a number of people who only feel comfortable at Mass when everyone is wearing a mask, and we appreciate their concerns. However, it is important to realize that decisions regarding issues like this must take into account many factors. While we certainly want everyone to feel safe at Mass, we cannot ignore those who are struggling or even leaving the parish over the current mask policy.

As you know, the COVID-19 situation has improved to the point where the state of Colorado has decreased its alert level to “yellow.” Furthermore, restaurants are able to allow diners to sit at their tables without wearing masks—they simply must wear them when walking around inside (i.e. entering and leaving). Concerning churches, other parishes in the area have implemented less restrictive policies more in line with what restaurants are doing and have not encountered any problems.

In light of these facts, we are considering two Sunday Masses, 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., where the people may sit in their places without wearing their masks. The policy at these two Masses would be this:

- Masks must be worn when entering, leaving, and moving about inside the church building.
- Social distancing of six feet will continue to be maintained.
- Masks may be lowered ONLY when seated.
- We will continue to sanitize the seating areas after each Mass.

We are looking to begin this new arrangement starting Feb. 21 (the first Sunday of Lent).

We understand that some parishioners may have difficulty with this new policy, but we believe we can implement it in a safe manner. According to the CDC, exposure to COVID-19 is defined as “someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more” (see <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact>). As you can see above, we have taken this definition into account when creating this new policy. For those who still do not feel comfortable, please remember there are numerous opportunities to attend Mass where wearing a mask is still mandatory—this change only affects two Masses at this time. All the Masses during the week require everyone to wear masks, as well as seven Sunday Masses.

In all cases, charity must guide our interactions with fellow parishioners.

We hope this new approach will allow all parishioners to find a Mass where they can most easily focus on the Lord in scripture, in prayer, and especially in the Most Holy Eucharist. By God’s grace, we can begin to return, little by little, to a sense of normalcy in our parish life.

In Christ,

Fr. Javier Nieva, DCJM
Parish Administrator