

November 25, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

I wish you all a blessed and grace-filled Thanksgiving! I pray that the God of the Harvest blesses you with good health and keeps you safe now and always.

God has been gracious to our faith community for the past few months because we remained healthy. It has also been challenging to accommodate the federal, state, and Diocesan guidance but I believe that we've done much to accommodate in person attendance and the safety of everyone.

The recent increase of the spread covid-19 infection in North Carolina and in particular, Duplin county is under category "orange", per NCDHHS, means substantial community spread.

Since we have started in person masses at 50% capacity and maintaining social distance, we have been blessed because no one has informed me that infection occurred after attending mass. I am thankful and always praying for the safety of all. But let us not wait for that to happen in our church. You and I do not want the publicity of our church as having been shut down because of infection.

It is our Christian responsibility to *whatever you did for one of the least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me*. During this pandemic, the person next to you at church, the other family sitting next to you in the church is the least, the vulnerable. As a Christian, it is prudent and pro-life to think of the safety and protection of life of the person next to you whether it be your spouse or another family.

I am appealing to each one of you, in the light of the latest NC EO 180 (<https://files.nc.gov/governor/documents/files/EO180-Face-Coverings-Requirements.pdf>) and the Diocesan guidance (<https://dioceseofraleigh.org/news/updated-guidance-masses-parish-ministries-and-sacraments-effective-nov-24>), starting this First Sunday of Advent face covering/mask is required for all with the exemption of those with real medical condition such as asthma or breathing issues. In those cases we request you sit in the back near the right door. We will also be streaming the Mass to our Parish hall where a mask will not be required. We will bring the Eucharist to the Hall during Communion.

As a church of the Transfiguration of Jesus, may we shine by helping stop the spread of the virus.

Thank you for your cooperation and may God bless you all.

Sincerely,

Fr. Randy

Below is the Guidance for Masses, Parish Ministries and Celebrations of the Sacraments from the Diocese of Raleigh.

Provided parishes can meet appropriate social distancing requirements and/or logistical arrangements, indoor services can be conducted including Mass, the Sacrament of Penance, Adoration, and individual prayer.

As stated by Bishop Zarama, all of the faithful continue to be dispensed from their Sunday obligation. While this dispensation is applicable to all, the elderly, those sick, those with pre-existing health conditions or other vulnerable people should especially continue to stay at home.

Outdoor worship services in unenclosed spaces may continue to be an option for many parishes as it allows more flexibility in following recommendations to promote social distancing and reduce transmission.

Arrangements should be made by each parish to provide appropriate parking, spacing, sound systems, etc. The faithful are not to remain in vehicles during these services and should be encouraged to bring their own lawn chairs, blankets, etc., as necessary.

Additional precautions are to be taken when distributing Holy Communion, including frequent use of hand sanitizer by Eucharistic Ministers.

No Communion from the chalice and/or shaking hands during the Sign of Peace.

Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmission:

- Maintain at least six (6) feet social distancing from other individuals, with the exception of family or household members. · NC Executive Order 180, issued on November 23, 2020, stated that masks/face coverings must be worn whenever an individual is near someone who is not from the same household, including in any public indoor space even when maintaining 6 feet of distance.
- Carry hand sanitizer with you when leaving home, and use it frequently.
- Wash hands using soap and water for at least twenty (20) seconds as frequently as possible.
- Regularly clean high-touch surfaces such as steering wheels, wallets, and phones.
- Stay at home if sick.

Avoid Exceeding Emergency Maximum Occupancy:

The most recent guidance does not prohibit gatherings for worship services but still recommends against holding Mass Gatherings (defined as more than 10 people). Should parishes offer indoor Masses, they should adhere to Emergency Maximum Occupancy recommendations which is the lowest number produced by applying the following three tests:

- Limit the number of visitors in the space to fifty percent (50%) of stated fire capacity
- Or, for spaces without a stated fire capacity, no more than twelve (12) persons for every one thousand (1000) square feet of the location's total square footage, including the parts of the location that are not accessible to visitors.
- Limit the number of people in the space so that groups can stay six (6) feet apart.