

God's Beloved Saints,

I am writing today to announce some changes to our parish policy about worship and wearing masks.

After prayerful consultation with a variety of parishioners – particularly those who have young children or have underlying health concerns – **the Vestry has decided to relax our requirement for wearing a mask in worship.**

Our policy has now changed from “Masks required” to “Masks recommended”, starting Sunday, March 27.

There are several factors that went into our decision:

- **In the two weeks** since Governor Murphy dropped the school mask mandate on March 7, there has been a slight rise in cases in Morris and Somerset Counties, but our local Board of Health statistics remain quite low.
- **Bishop Hughes on March 9 gave permission** for parishes in the Diocese of Newark to make local decisions about masking, depending on the particular needs of the congregation. She asked us to pay particular attention to the needs of the most vulnerable in the parish.
- **While we know that there may be a further rise in COVID levels** at some point, we need to offer a break from a mask requirement while we are able to do so.

There are a few things about which we will still be cautious:

- **Singing – our Choir will continue to wear masks for singing. We strongly recommended that parishioners also put on a mask to sing hymns.** Because singing and loud, projected speaking produce more aerosol particles than normal speech, the NJ Department of Health school guidelines and organizations such as the American Choral Directors Association, the Center for Congregational Song, and the International Coalition Performing Arts Aerosol Study all recommend continuing the practice of wearing masks while singing indoors.
- **Lectors/Eucharistic Ministers – will continue to wear** masks while they are reading or leading the Prayers of the People.
- **I will continue to wear a mask** to preach, preside at worship, and distribute Communion.
- **Communion will still be administered as Bread only, standing at the altar step.** Bishop Hughes has not yet restored the use of Wine and the Cup for the congregation.
- **Seating** – the ribbons have been removed from the pews. Every seat is available; you may still want to spread out.
- **Ventilation** – we continue to use the ultra-violet sanitizing lights in our HVAC system, and to have open windows at the altar area.
- **If and when there is another COVID spike**, we will be ready to move quickly to resume our former restrictions for the time that they are needed.

Finally, we will respect the personal decision that each person makes for themselves and for the health and well-being of their families. And we will endeavor to care for the most vulnerable amongst us.

This has been a long two years. I am very proud of the way our parishioners have cared for one another and our neighbors, have been resourceful and resilient, and have kept our focus on our faith in Christ. **You are, indeed, God's Beloved Saints!**

Blessings, Vicki+