



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

19 May 2021

Hieromartyr Patrick, Bishop of Prussa, & his companions

No. 78

To the Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Diocese of the Midwest:

Christ is risen!

As you may have heard, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has updated its recommended protocols concerning the use of masks. Essentially, masks are no longer mandated for those persons who *have been fully vaccinated*. This means that those who have received their final COVID vaccination (one or two, depending on the vaccine) and waited two weeks no longer need to wear masks indoors or outdoors, in large or small groups or gatherings, and without concern for social distancing. This would seem to include gatherings in church. The CDC also recommended and advised that *those who are not fully vaccinated* should (not must) continue to wear masks for the time being in order to protect themselves and others from potential exposure.

In addition, most if not all of the governors in the Midwest have rescinded mask mandates and lifted all restrictions effective today, or in early June. There are some local municipal authorities that have not rescinded mask mandates but may do so by mid-June.

Given the above information, I am rescinding the mask mandate directive for all parishes in the Diocese of the Midwest effective today or on the date any municipal authority lifts the mandate that effects your parish.

With the reality that masks will now be recommended but not mandated for those who have not had the vaccine, how do we address this? *I will not support any idea* that involves some kind of vaccine passport where people need to show they have been vaccinated to gain entrance. I think the time has come to allow people to be in church and not *have to* wear a mask in order to stay. With this letter I have attached something that I want parish clergy to read before the next liturgy begins in your parish and post it at the entrance. In cases where local municipal mask mandates are

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still in place, you can wait until those are lifted and then read the attached disclaimer from me to the parish and then post it on your entrance. I still have no problem, though, with priests encouraging those who have not been vaccinated to wear a mask as this is the CDC recommendation and my recommendation.

There is no realistic way to monitor this new provision, i.e. to determine who has or hasn't yet been vaccinated. Indeed, this is a matter of personal concern which many would not want to share. In the parish context, this puts our clergy in the unenviable and unfeasible position of monitoring something which is impossible to monitor. Because of this, I ask that individual parishioners and families, whether wearing masks or not, monitor themselves in this regard, always in a manner that is respectful of others in the parish community.

With the lifting of the mask mandate, I am also directing all parishes in the Diocese to return to the practice of giving communion with one spoon. Use of multiple individual spoons or several spoons sanitized in alcohol are to be discontinued. If this poses concerns for some clergy, please contact me and we can talk.

As to social hour, if hot food is served, it should still be served by a select group of people wearing masks and gloves when they serve the food. I still think it is best to serve catered meals as they have been properly prepared. I hope this could end by September.

This has been a tough burden for all of us to bear in the last year. I knew once we got through Pascha, I would need to address this issue. The events of the last 10 days presented the opportunity to do so and I have. Many thanks to all my clergy and parishioners who have shown patience through this process. Let us pray for each other and bear each other's burdens as we move forward in opening up our parishes.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you. With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Paul". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+PAUL

Archbishop of Chicago and the Midwest

On May 13, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) updated their guidance stating the following, “if you are fully vaccinated, you can resume activities that you did prior to the pandemic.” In accordance with this guidance, I am lifting the mandate to wear masks while in the churches of the Diocese of the Midwest. Wearing a mask is recommended, but not mandated. This will be left up to personal discretion and consultation with one’s physician.

While the vaccine is recommended by the CDC, those who have not yet received their vaccination, or those who choose not to receive a vaccine, assume all and any risk by entering the temple without a mask and going against the recommendations of the CDC which are also mine.

I request that everyone who enters the church exercise good judgement and utilize sanitary measures as we have done throughout this past year.

Yours in Christ
+PAUL