

October 29, 2021

Dear Saint Benedict Family Member(s),

As fall gives way to winter and we remember "All the Saints" and our beloved dead in early November and our "National Day of Thanksgiving" later in the month, I give thanks in daily prayer for you. It is a joy to minister within the community of Saint Benedict Parish! Thank you for the trust you place in me as your Pastor. I sincerely appreciate it.

I last wrote to you in late September, highlighting the increasing prevalence of the "Delta Variant" and sharing an earnest plea from the Chief of Staff of Providence Hospital, Dr. Walkinshaw, for a period of 2-4 weeks of increased vigilance in the hope of slowing the spread of this more virulent strain through masking. I know many don't like to wear a mask; frankly, neither do I! A few of you have expressed dismay at my instituting a mask mandate. I don't like my mask mandate, either.

The rate of new infections appears to be falling nationwide, while vaccination rates appear to be climbing. Of course, with the holidays approaching and increased travel, it's possible we'll see another resurgence. As we continue to walk this path together, I try to seek charity in all things. Thank you for continuing to reflect on the ways you can help contribute to the common good. Thank you for diligently studying the nature of this pandemic and for making prudent personal decisions as to whether to get vaccinated and/or wear a mask in public spaces. In charity, we owe this diligence to one another.

As we approach the end of the four weeks requested by Providence Hospital, although I strongly recommend that you continue to mask while in our church and school buildings, I plan to relax the mandate and allow for optional masking in our buildings within certain constraints.

Beginning Tuesday, Nov. 2nd, for weekend and daily Masses, those wearing masks may continue to sit in any location in the building. We will return to reserving the north banks of pews, exclusively, for those wearing a mask. These pews will be specially marked with colored tape. In addition, we will open the downstairs seating area for masked attendees only. Folks choosing not to wear a mask are free to sit in any location of the church except for the areas expressly reserved for those wearing masks. Clergy and altar servers will continue to mask until at least the beginning of Advent. I trust this arrangement will foster a safe environment for those desiring to wear a mask (especially downstairs where one can also more easily socially-distance), as well as allow the opportunity for those electing not to mask to also feel comfortable when coming to worship. My ardent hope is that by maintaining appropriate vigilance, we can collectively work towards minimizing the spread of the COVID virus and return to our "once normal" lives again!

Again, my sincere thanks and appreciation for the sacrifices you have made and continue to make. I know the road has not been easy – for any of us. I sincerely wish you and your extended family an early "Happy Thanksgiving." As always, please feel free to contact me on my cell at (907) 317-9042 should you have questions, concerns, or comments. May our Lord continue to bless the efforts we put forth in His Name!

FR. Tom