

My Dear Friends in Christ,

We have received some news this week from our Bishop Edward Malesic. He has issued a statement to all parishes in the diocese, moving from "*recommend*" to the words "*strongly encourage*" regarding the wearing of masks in church, regardless of vaccination status. He also instructed the faithful to "*please use charity and patience with those who do not wish to comply with this strongly stated request*". Our parish position has been updated in response to the Bishop's message: **We strongly encourage the wearing of masks for Mass when seated in close proximity to others.**

We especially want to draw your attention to the words "*patience and charity*". Given the passion with which many have approached the question of masking, it all the more demands that we heed the words of Saint Paul, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bear with one another through love". *Ephesians 4:2*

In the serious matters of our Worship and Education, with our desire to remain in person and ensure the health and safety of everyone involved, ***our focus should not be on who is right, or being perceived as right, but rather on getting it right.***

We encourage you to read the letter from Bishop Malesic that is included in this week's parish bulletin. Every one of us is frustrated and tired of the pandemic and wishes to see it end. As we continue to weather these turbulent times, please keep in your prayers all those afflicted by the coronavirus, those vulnerable among us, and the hospital staffs and medical workers on the front lines of the pandemic.

The bishop also shared that this request to wear face masks at indoor Masses is temporary and will be changed once the current level of increased coronavirus cases is over. Be comforted by these words from Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "We do not lose heart... for this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal glory beyond all measure".

*2 Corinthians 4:16-17*

God Bless and Keep You.

Fr. Tim and the Staff of Saint Raphael