



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Office of the Bishop

December 22, 2021

Dear Monsignor, Father, and Pastoral Director,

The Nativity of the Lord and the Christmas season is a time when many Catholics come back to Mass. In light of rising COVID case numbers and increased attendance at Mass, I am once again asking you to strongly encourage parishioners to wear a mask while attending Mass.

Your people look to you for encouragement and advice. Please lead by example by wearing a mask when not celebrating the Mass, make this announcement from the pulpit and in email communications, and make sure that signage around the parish reflects this guidance. Your help in this regard will ensure that we can welcome as many as possible to our upcoming liturgical celebrations. I understand this is short notice, but parishes should have masks available for attendees as much as possible.

At the same time, I realize people may have reasons for not wanting to wear a mask. They too should be welcomed and not turned away.

Our health care providers are pleading for help in fighting this pandemic. Wearing a mask while attending Mass and getting vaccinated are two ways in which we can explicitly show our respect for human life and our commitment to the common good.

I thank you for all of the ways you have served and continue to serve your communities. The pandemic has changed and challenged us. But we are reminded in a special way this week that God is with us and always will be.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids



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December 25, 2021

Dear Members of St. Joseph Parish,

Merry Christmas!

The Christmas Season brings so many moments of joy which you will share with your family and friends over the coming days. We have welcomed our Lord and Savior into this world, and we celebrate His arrival. The past four weeks of Advent have been a journey of anticipation and preparation for His coming. During Advent the Catholic Church invites us to take a step back and look at who we are, what we are doing, and how we submit our will, our very lives to His Divine Drama. I hope you were able to embrace the long waiting of Advent.

Jesus became (incarnate) embodied in flesh at the Annunciation and born into the world, for you, to bring direction and meaning into our life of exile. In this moment we celebrate that He came to die so that we may have joy in the present and eternal happiness with Him in heaven. Over the next eight (Octave) days of Christmas, I encourage you to take some additional time in prayerful reflection and biblical discernment of God's will for your life over the next year. What is God calling you to do? How is He calling you to steward your gifts of Time (in prayer and growth), Talent (your abilities and passions), and Treasure (your riches of comfort and finances)?

As a Parish, we too, must reassess regularly how God is calling us to be Stewards of the gifts He's given us through biblical discernment as well. Over the next few months, we are going to be going through some adjustments and refocusing. The staffing changes are going to require several changes to how things are scheduled and managed throughout our parish. To successfully navigate this transition, we need to know everything that is expected or planned to happen which may, or may not, be scheduled for our parish.

If you host any trips, events, prayer experiences, book studies, or any type of planned and/or promoted event, including meetings that are held on campus, the Parish Office needs to ensure that they are on the calendar. Please submit the dates for events held between January 15 and May 1 to the Parish Office no later than January 15. Any events not listed on the calendar after January 15, including the liturgical calendar, does not impact School events which are scheduled through the School Office. All ministries and event leaders are going to be asked to submit event dates throughout the year and will be required to submit a budget request in the Spring (more information about the budget will be sent after the Christmas Season). We understand the need

to be flexible to current events. Imminent needs may arise which would require an event to be added or date changed, contact the Parish Office at that time to discuss options.

As members of the Body of Christ we must work together to support each other and propagate the Catholic faith. Moving forward all events offered by St. Joseph Parish will be Christ-first and Christ-centered. If we are not making Jesus and the fullness of the Catholic faith the center of everything we do, then we are not fulfilling His great commission.

Over the next year we will be focusing on growing in faith, not just growing in community. Individuals can grow in community in many ways and are encouraged to do so. However, individuals can only grow in faith one way, by embracing the life of faith; prayer, study and service. As Catholics we are called to celebrate the Sacraments continuously, especially by reading Scripture, formation opportunities, and service of others in our community.

In our staff changes, we will continue working to fulfill our mission: the salvation of souls. True stewards always recognize they are a part of the Divine Drama not an Ego Drama; I am so excited for all our stewards. Together we can help bring our brothers and sisters home to the richness we embrace in our Catholic faith.

I am praying for each of you throughout this entire year. I ask that you also pray for each other, our Church and School Staff, and myself. During this year there are expected to be some struggles and hurdles we must navigate together.

“Do not fear what might happen tomorrow. The same everlasting father who cares for you today will care for your tomorrow and every day. Either He will shield you from suffering, or he will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, then, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginings.” ~St. Francis de Sales

Many Christmas Blessings!

Fr. Darrel Kempf