



14 May 2021

Dear St. Francis Xavier Parishioners,

May God's peace be with all of you as we celebrate the Feast of St. Matthias! Today, the Church rejoices in God's Providence in selecting a successor to Judas and we can each reflect upon the manner in which God calls us to embrace our work as His people. The past week has seen a number of developments in Minnesota regarding the COVID-19 protocols that will impact our worship at Mass, so I am writing this letter to provide everyone with an update on the plans for our parish at this time. Please note that there are still some unanswered questions regarding Gov. Walz's decision today to lift the state mask mandate as Archbishop Hebda has not provided us with any update as to what this will mean for the Archdiocese's decision on requiring masks at Mass and in parish offices and schools.

In the past week I have heard from parishioners who are excited about the opportunities to expand our capacity at Mass and function more freely, but I also have heard from parishioners who are greeting this news with concern. As pastor, I want to remind each person to approach this situation with compassion and understanding that people have different perspectives on how to best approach COVID-19 and to appreciate that a free society does allow for differences of opinion and conduct without vilifying or prematurely judging another person. I see in the situation that we now face an opportunity for each of us to practice and grow in the virtue of prudence.

The word "prudence" comes from the Latin word *prudencia*, meaning foresight or sagacity. From a theological perspective, the virtue of prudence is a cardinal virtue that allows for correct knowledge about things to be done or to be avoided. In order to practice the virtue, three stages should be followed. First, one must take counsel carefully with oneself and from others. Second, following upon such consultation, one must judge thoughtfully and honestly on the evidence at hand. Third, and finally, one is to direct his or her actions accord to the norms determined after a prudent judgment has been made. It is entirely consistent within the virtue of prudence that people will arrive at different judgments based on the evidence available to them and the fact that circumstances change. The prudential response to COVID-19 for a 75-year-old will not necessarily be the same as the response of a 30-year-old. Similarly, a person with cancer will evaluate and render a prudential judgment differently than someone who does not have cancer.

After consulting parish leadership and discussing the recent changes in civil and ecclesiastical orders with some medical doctors and registered nurses, I have decided that our parish will return to its pre-pandemic sacramental schedule beginning Saturday, May 29th of this year. On this date, confessions will once again begin being heard in the confessional instead of the sacristy and we will resume confessions on Friday mornings at 7:30 a.m. We also will be bringing sacristans back into their roles at Mass, though we have not yet set a date in which altar servers will resume their role. We also will be bringing back Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for the Sunday Masses beginning at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 29th.

At this time, we will continue to have people drop their contributions in the basket in the Gathering Space on their way out of the church, as the Archdiocese has stated the passing of collection baskets is not to resume prior to July 1st of this year. We similarly will not be processing the gifts up to the altar during Mass at this time, nor will we be resuming the opening or closing processions for Mass right away either. However, there will be important changes to how we gather for Mass starting Memorial Day weekend.

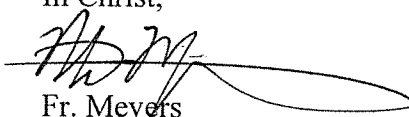
The SignUp Genius will be used this weekend and also for Pentecost (May 22nd-23rd), but will cease to be used following that weekend. We will open up every pew for people to sit in beginning Saturday, May 29th and there will be no requirement for any registration beforehand. When sitting at Mass, please be mindful that not everyone is ready to have a person from another household sitting close to them, so I encourage everyone to be especially attentive to other people's comfort level on this question and respectfully provide a person with space if asked to do so. Our ushers will continue to help people find seating, but there will no longer be the same degree of assigned seating that we've experienced over the past year.

Another important change is that we will begin processing forward to receive Holy Communion during Mass the weekend of May 29th. We have already been doing this during the daily Masses without any incident and, therefore, it seems prudent to take this additional step as the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted in Minnesota. We will still only be distributing the host at this time. In order to provide less time for people to be standing next to one another during Communion, the people sitting on St. Mary's side of the church will process down the north side aisle and then return to their pews through the center aisle while the people sitting on St. Joseph's side of the church will process down the center aisle and then return to their pews through the south side aisle of the church.

We are currently reviewing two possible hymnals to replace our *Gather* hymnal, which will no longer be used since it features David Haas' music in such abundance that much of the musical selection will be rendered unusable for our worship. A decision on the hymnal will be made in the next month and then we will work to order and bring these new hymnals into our church. In the meantime, we are reviewing possible ways in which we may be able to use some printouts of music for people to sing during Mass. I also would like to encourage those who are interested in playing the piano or becoming a cantor or joining our choir once it is reformed, to please contact Dustin Austreng at the parish office so that we can continue to expand and build our music ministry as we move to this next stage of reopening.

As of this writing, the Archdiocese is still requiring us to wear face covering while at Mass, though it is possible this will change very soon. I will announce any changes on the face covering requirements in our parish once I have heard of any change; so, as of right now, please plan to wear a face covering while attending Mass this weekend. Please join me in praying for all who are involved in leadership roles as we address the questions and ask the Lord to grant each of us a strong and vibrant participation in the virtue of prudence.

In Christ,


Fr. Meyers