



FROM THE DESK OF FR. MIKE

We come together on the fourth and final Sunday of this Advent season. We have been praying our way through the hope-filled season, at St. Mary's, in our homes, with friends and loved ones. In the days to come we will be sharing with friends and family the gift of Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace, born as Savior of the world.

We know that Mary and Joseph did not have the modern conveniences that we know in the 21st century. The Holy Family experienced many challenges in the pregnancy, birth, and life of our Lord. As we celebrate Mary and Joseph welcoming their Son, the Christ child, this year it is as important as ever to prepare for safe and healthy celebrations with loved ones.

I received the following in a newsletter from Loyola Hospital and share it with one and all as we look forward with joy to our Christmas celebrations, at St. Mary's and with loved ones. *"The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offer valuable holiday guidance to help you lower the risk of contracting and spreading the virus.*

The CDC recommends celebrating virtually or only with members of your own household (who are consistently taking measures to reduce to spread of COVID-19) as the best way to stay safe and healthy this holiday season and to avoid the spread of the coronavirus.

Are you hosting a holiday gathering?

If you are still planning to host a holiday event, you should:

Protect those not yet eligible for vaccination by getting yourself and other eligible people around them vaccinated.

Celebrate with family or household members only to prevent the risk of spreading COVID-19. Ask non-household friends and family to stay home this year.

Increase ventilation by opening windows and doors, or by placing central air and heating on continuous circulation.

Clean hands often – Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds when entering and exiting social gatherings. Make sure there is adequate soap or hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol available.

Limit the number of people handling or serving food – If serving any food, consider identifying one person to serve all food so that multiple people are not handling the serving utensils.

Are you going to an event?

If you are planning to attend a holiday gathering, you should also:

Wear a well-fitted mask in a public indoor setting.

Consider arriving early or at off-peak times to avoid crowding.

Are you planning to travel this holiday season?

Traveling increases the chance of getting and spreading COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. If you are considering traveling for the holidays, the CDC has information to help you decide what is best for you and your family. Washing your hands and avoiding touching your face will help keep you and those around you safer. Also consider whether COVID-19 is spreading at your destination. The more cases at your destination, the more likely you are to get infected during travel and spread the virus to others when you return."

These guidelines offered from the hospital coincide with protocols we have been instructed by the Archdiocese of Chicago to use during the COVID pandemic, including wearing masks in church. May our holidays, our Masses, and our loved ones be joyous and safe.

We hope that you and your loved ones enjoy the beauty of Christmas with family and friends, especially if you are traveling away from town. The schedule of Masses appears in the bulletin and newsletter for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, as well as the Feast of the Holy Family on Sunday, December 26.

May we welcome with joy and gladness all who celebrate the birth of the Savior of the world at St. Mary's this Christmas, and throughout the Christmas season.

God bless you with receptive hearts to the birth of the Prince of Peace,