

7-14-20

Dear Members of Saint John's,

Are masks required at our Church services?

Recently the Mayor of Anchorage required that masks be worn in all public gatherings in Anchorage. Dr. Anne Zink, Alaska's chief medical officer, said she wears a mask in public for three reasons:

"Humility, because I don't know if I have COVID as it is clear that people can spread the disease before they have symptoms. Kindness, because I don't know if this person I'm near has a kid battling cancer, or cares for an elder. And for community. I want my community to thrive, businesses to stay open and employees to stay healthy."

Humility, kindness, community. These characteristics are central to our own Christian faith. So how can we not follow the request to wear a mask in public spaces, including Church services? I hate wearing a mask, and I recoil at seeing my friends wear masks since it obscures their beautiful faces and the many subtle expressions by which we communicate. I hear some dislike masks because they don't believe the "authorities" or feel the requirement for a mask infringes on their personal liberty. But do these feelings reflect our Christian spirit or some other spirit? Saint Paul told us to respect civil authorities, and our Archbishop Joseph has asked us to cooperate with the state in fighting this pandemic. A few don't like masks because they feel it shows we are afraid and don't have enough trust in God. But Jesus told us plainly that we are not to tempt God. This means we are to do our part to live as wisely and safely as we can while still trusting and honoring God. And how "Christian" can it be to insinuate another person's faith is "weaker" and parade my own as stronger by not wearing a mask? So, yes, as a Christian, who am surely tired of this pandemic and whose spiritual shortcomings have been repeatedly revealed in frustration through this difficult time, I can wear a mask to Church, because ultimately it is about humility, kindness and community, and these are good for my soul.

Let me also pass on just a few other important notes about Church services.

- Attendance at Saturday Vespers (7:15pm) is now open to any who want to come regardless of which group you are in. If this results in a gathering beyond our current limits, then we will reconsider.
- We had hoped that by the end of July we might be able to increase the size of our Church gatherings to join three groups together, but due to the recent upsurge of Covid cases in Anchorage, I think it best we keep our Liturgy Groups as they are through August. This extended schedule will be posted soon on our website.
- If you have a reason to attend a Liturgy when your Group is not scheduled, please talk with me or Deborah Stallman ahead of time to make sure there is room.

- Finally, if you have not signed up to attend Liturgy in one of the Groups, I encourage you to do so. If you have any questions or concerns at all about this that I can help with, please do not hesitate to call me.

With love and respect,

Fr. Marc