

Dear Teachers, Students, Parents and Guardians,

Firstly, we would like to say thank you for all your continued support during these turbulent times. When starting the school year, it was decided by the Diocese, with guidance from their hygienist, that St. Mary's Parish School would allow masks to be optional and exemptions for students who had a doctor's or parent note stating their child had a medical exception. This approach was taken with the expectation that Covid-19 numbers would continue to decline. For a short amount of time that was the case, however, current trends no longer support that approach.

Due to rising number of Covid-19 cases in our area presently, it was decided, that our Covid-19 committee would reconvene to assess the current safety of our students and staff. On November 30, 2021 our Covid committee met and decided that based on the most current infection trends in our area, along with the holiday season in full swing, we will be reinforcing the requirement of masks indoors at St. Mary's Parish School with the exception when eating, drinking or during masks breaks, as was originally set forth by the Westfield Department of Health earlier in the school year. This requirement was voted on unanimously by both the Covid -19 committee members on November 30th as well as the St. Mary's Parish School board members on December 2nd. It is important to note that moving forward masks exemptions will only apply to student and staff who cannot wear a mask due to medical or behavioral reasons and do require a doctor's note.

Wearing a mask is not only to protect ourselves, but it also is to protect others. As per the CDC Covid-19 is a communicable disease spread by aerosol droplets that are expelled by coughing, sneezing and even to a certain extent by breathing. For this reason, masks – along with social distancing –are an important tool in fighting the spread of Covid-19 and the new variants. Wearing a mask limits the possibility of dispersing infected particles in the air, as well as reducing the risk of inhaling them.

Although some people have raised objections to wearing masks as we all continue to battle the coronavirus pandemic, doing so can be an act of charity for one's neighbor. While masks may be somewhat uncomfortable, they are a small inconvenience that can be embraced out of charity for others. Catholics may want to consider the question of public health not solely from a perspective of rights, but from the viewpoint of service and friendship to which Christ calls us all.

Please know that our Covid committee plans on meeting again in January. At that time, we will reassess the mask requirement as we are very well aware of the social and emotional impact that masks can have on everyone. However, safety should always come first and the decision was made in mind with the health and safety of our students and staff. Thank you for pivoting with us in these ever-changing times and we appreciate your support and cooperation in keeping our school open and keeping everyone safe. Please pray that this pandemic will end soon.

May God bless our families and our school,

Fr. John Salatino