

# Parishes still required to mandate face mask use

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ALLOUEZ — The Diocese of Green Bay announced March 31 that diocesan parishes will continue to require the use of face coverings and masks.

The announcement, issued by Fr. Luke Ferris, vicar for clergy and pastoral leaders, was addressed to priests, pastoral leaders and parish leaders. It was released on the same day the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that Gov. Tony Evers exceeded his authority when issuing public health emergencies, including mask mandates.

“The ruling does not address the health benefits regarding the wearing of masks,” stated Fr. Ferris. “Diocesan guidelines are intended to help parishes provide an opportunity for the faithful to encounter Christ in the liturgy of the church while at the same time remaining safe. If there are members of the faithful who do not wear masks due to medical or other reasons, they are certainly welcome at Mass, but a separate seating area should be provided whenever possible.”

Fr. Ferris added that a diocesan COVID-19 task force “continues to measure and monitor a number of benchmarks ... to guide us in determining when our restrictions can be lifted or changed.”

“These benchmarks will help in establishing trends that indicate we are truly in a moderate or lower COVID-19 case rate/burden,” he said. “Presently, nine out of 16 counties in the Diocese of Green Bay have COVID-19 activity levels that remain in a high level (activity level reflects a combination of case burden rate and trajectory). Case burden rate is moderate or low in six counties.”

The announcement included scenarios when the mask requirement may be exempt, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- Children between the ages of 2 and 5 are encouraged to wear face coverings/masks when physical distancing is not possible. The CDC does not recommend face coverings/masks for children under the age of 2.

- Individuals who have trouble breathing.
- Individuals with medical conditions, intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, or other sensory sensitivities that prevent the individual from wearing a face covering/mask.

“We encourage all parishes and affiliated schools to remain vigilant about the steps to decrease the spread of COVID-19 to others through the use of face covering/masks, social distancing and hand hygiene,” added Fr. Ferris.

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