

From: **Christ the Savior Orthodox Church** steven.k@christthesavioroca.org   
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To: zosimas@mac.com

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## IN THE LIFE OF THE PARISH

Dear Parish Faithful,

CHRIST IS RISEN!      INDEED HE IS RISEN!

**More Comments on the New Diocesan Directive** - By this coming weekend, June 5-6, we will implement the new Midwest Diocesan directives, that this will allow us to remove the masks that we have been wearing in church for over a year now. Yet, Archbishop Paul and I both agree that the transition back to "normal" parish life is going to be far more difficult than was our unavoidable transition to living with a pandemic in our midst. His new directives are meant to begin that process of normalization, but they are simultaneously causing real concern for many of the faithful, and that is true for our parish as well. Removing our masks is easy for some and not that easy for others. We must also be aware of any potential effect this will have on our children. His Eminence understands this, so in his pastoral letter outlining the new directives, he is doing his best to pastorally and diplomatically "walk" along a pretty thin line. The heart of the issue is about the vaccine - those who have received it and those who have not. His Eminence wrote:

*"With the reality that masks will now be recommended but not mandated for those who have not had the vaccine, how do we address this? **I will not support any idea** that involves some kind of vaccine passport where people need to show they have been vaccinated to gain entrance. I think the time has come to allow people to be in church and not **have** to wear a mask in order to stay."*

But His Eminence has also written these two statements embedded in the same document:

*"The CDC also recommended and advised that those who are not fully vaccinated should (not must) continue to wear masks for the time being in order to protect themselves and others from potential exposure."*

*"I still have no problem, though, with priests encouraging those who have not been vaccinated to wear a mask as this is the CDC recommendation and my recommendation."*

I am assuming that this addresses the reality of any given parish having some parishioners who cannot receive the vaccine because of medical conditions that would then make it problematic and perhaps unsettling for them to be in a new

...could then make it problematic and perhaps shocking for them to be in a new "mask-less" environment all of a sudden. Hence, a real concern can arise. And, of course, there are our many unvaccinated children who face potential exposure under the conditions outlined in the new directives. This is not an artificial dilemma for families. And some have expressed that to me.

Hopefully, everyone can sympathize with one more statement found in the new document:

*"In the parish context, this puts our clergy in the unenviable and unfeasible position of monitoring something which is impossible to monitor."*

Very true! Please pray that your priest and pastor can actually show some wisdom in this matter.

This last statement from His Eminence leads to this broad appeal to all members of a given parish family:

*"Because of this, I ask that individual parishioners and families, whether wearing masks or not, monitor themselves in this regard, **always in a manner that is respectful of others in the parish community.**"*

What position and practice best serves the common good of the parish and the needs and concerns of my neighbor? That is how I am reading this last statement. My goal is thus to awaken awareness to the issues involved. Please carefully think out Archbishop Paul's communication from all of the sides he is approaching this from. *Having given this some real thought and attention, I will follow the guidelines outlined above and **recommend** the wearing of masks for those who are not vaccinated, at least for the immediate future, with a further assessment to be made shortly after we implement the new directives.* This offers protection for oneself and for others - adults and children alike. Parents may thus further decide to keep the masks on their children. This can relieve the anxiety of some parents and give them more "peace of mind" in bringing their children to church. My pastoral goal is to continue to maximize parishioner participation in the Liturgy - both adults and children.

Truly, the pastoral issues arising in the much-anticipated normalization of parish life are real and complex. I can assure you as the parish priest that this is a difficult terrain to navigate. And this is without even "getting into" the return to the common Communion spoon yet! That will be the focus of a future communication.

For the month of June, as we acclimate ourselves to our new parish environment, we will continue to distribute 75 tickets per Liturgy. Together with our clergy and

choir, that will take us over 80 persons in the church at one time.

In Christ,

Fr. Steven

**Christ the Savior Orthodox Church** | 4285 Ashland Avenue, Norwood

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