

St. John Evangelist Roman Catholic COVID-19 UPDATE—December 31, 2021

As you are aware, over the past several weeks, we have experienced a major increase in the number of diagnosed COVID-19 cases. SJERC has maintained a proactive position throughout the pandemic, always with an abundance of caution and with the intention of respecting and providing an environment of comfort for the members of our community most vulnerable and cautious.

Proper safety protocols and practice have proven to aid in assisting in our effort to help keep our people safe, including those most vulnerable. As such, the Archdiocese is advising all parishes to review the below protocols for implementation. Because of the seriousness of this most recent spread and high level of contagiousness, it is urged that every effort be made to implement the following protocols.

These protocols, unless mandated by local or State order, are to remain in effect until the end of January 2022. At that time, a re-evaluation will occur to determine if an extension is required.

1. All parishes in jurisdictions where safety mandates exist (Howard County, Baltimore County & Baltimore City) are required to follow those mandates. Masking is required until orders are lifted by the authorizing agency. SJERC will comply with the Howard County mandates.
2. By Archdiocesan mandate, ALL parishes, regardless of masking mandates within the local jurisdiction, are to require all liturgical ministers and clergy to wear masks, except when speaking, until the end of January.
3. All parishes, regardless of masking mandates within the local jurisdiction, are to make a full and good faith effort to encourage all attendees to be masked while attending mass. SJERC will continue its ongoing practice of requiring wearing of masks during our liturgies and gatherings.
4. Carefully evaluate all ministries and activities that are occurring during the month of January and determine, to the extent possible, how to transition them to a virtual mode or limited contact-mode. This effort to limit parish activities includes third party use of facilities such as Scouts, community groups and other such gatherings. SJERC is evaluating the implementation of this transition and will suspend on-campus meetings until the end of January. Impacted ministries and meetings will be notified promptly. SJERC will re-evaluate this suspension at the proper time.
5. For in-person ministry activity that remains, masking will be required for **ALL participants**. All other safety protocols including, hand sanitization, best attempts of social distancing (a minimum of 3 feet) and proper contact tracing in the event of a positive case occurring among the attendees, must be undertaken. In addition, subject to possible non-routine exception, all office transactions will be conducted in the reception area of the Interfaith Center, eliminating the necessity for full staff contact in the inner-office administration areas, effective immediately.
6. Individual third party users of facilities for events that are already scheduled during January, may proceed as planned. However, it is recommended that the Interfaith Center should not accept any new request for third party use of facilities for the month of January. Any events reserved after January should include the stipulation that the Interfaith Center has the option to cancel the event due to COVID-19 safety concerns. The Wilde Lake Interfaith Center will evaluate all scheduled activities and events that may be able to be postponed or cancelled.

7. SJERC will consider re-scheduling any parish in-person social gathers scheduled for the month of January for February or later in the year.
8. During liturgical celebrations, each parish is to carefully evaluate the logistics of continuing with choirs. If the parishes determine the choir can safely perform based upon spacing and other considerations, then the parish can continue with choirs. However if a parish is concerned about the feasibility to continue with the choir due to logistics, then the parish should begin using only a single cantor. This will be reevaluated at the end of January. Our Music Director is evaluating this recommendation and its implementation for SJERC.
9. All parishes must carefully adhere to proper hand sanitization following the distribution of communion on the tongue.
10. SJERC will continue with empty holy water fonts. But holy water remains available in the dispenser vessel. However, proper hand sanitization needs to be available for those who wish to sanitize prior to or following the blessing of themselves with the holy water.

As conditions change, hopefully for the better, The Archdiocese, SJERC, the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center and its COVID-19 Taskforce will make every effort to update the above protocols in a timely manner.

As we continue to journey in faith, may the love, the care and the respect of our parish family bring health, comfort and healing to all of us and to those we love.

Peace and the blessings of health and mutual support be yours in the New Year.

Fr. Gerry Bowen