



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



Pastoral Letter
To All Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, Religious Men and Women,
and Faithful Laity of the Diocese of Fort Worth

August 20, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

After consultation with our presbyteral council, college of consultors, members of my staff, and other clinicians and medical professionals, I am writing you to foster the mindfulness of a renewed vigilance in following the protocols for Mass and other gatherings during this new infectious-cycle of the COVID-19 variant currently present throughout North Texas. It should be noted that the COVID-19 “D” variant has a much higher rate of contagion than other variants and that the vaccinated can become infected and be asymptomatic; meaning they may not be aware that they have been infected and can spread the disease especially among the vulnerable.

Those ushers and lay ministers entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the safety protocols and all of us should avoid a spirit of complacency regarding such important protocols and practices as frequent hand washing and the use of sanitizer, the maintaining of at least three feet of physical distancing between individuals or households, and most importantly staying home if one feels sick and/or is exhibiting symptoms of the COVID-19 virus or any other contagious illness.

Our protocols for safety and good health have proven to be successful in preventing the spread of COVID-19 within our community. This was true even before the development and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. This summer, we experienced that our revised guidelines were successful in mitigating the spread of the virus during summer activities and camps. We anticipate that our guidelines will likewise effectively mitigate the spread of the virus and help protect the vulnerable from illness, especially now that we have a safe, effective vaccine available to us should we decide to receive it. The COVID-19 vaccine is now available to everyone 12 years and older, and I strongly encourage you to consult with your physician about getting vaccinated.

While we encourage the wearing of masks, especially for those who are unvaccinated or without natural immunity, we leave that decision to the discretion of our parishioners. We ask people to be mindful and respectful of the potential that the decisions they make regarding the wearing of masks may impact other people. Concern for other people should inform the decision that parishioners make regarding the wearing of masks. Both ordinary and extraordinary

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ministers of Communion must wear masks when distributing the Eucharist because of the close physical proximity between people in the performance of this ministry. If it becomes necessary to revise our guidelines, even temporarily, we will notify the impacted parishes accordingly. We thank you for your support and cooperation in advance should this become necessary.

The protocols included with this letter address the celebration of Mass and other liturgies and other social and ministerial gatherings in our parishes and institutions. They repeat and reaffirm the protocols for Mass promulgated by the Office of the Vicar General in the memo of April 26, 2021, and the Guidelines for Parish Gatherings Outside of Mass as promulgated by the Office of the Vicar General in the memo of May 20, 2021. These protocols remain in effect until further notice.

If one feels sick or is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or any other contagious virus, one should stay home from Mass. If one has responsibility for the care of a vulnerable person and legitimately has concerns of infecting that person with a virus, that one should feel obliged to stay home from Mass. If one does not feel safe in attending Mass for ongoing fear of contracting the virus, one should stay home. The obligation to attend Mass remains in effect by virtue of Divine Law and the Precepts of the Church and, excepting legitimate reasons like the reasons listed above, binds every Catholic under penalty of grave sin. If your health permits, you should plan on being physically present for the celebration of Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation.

While we know that viewing the celebration of Mass by means of live-streaming or television does not substitute for actual presence and participation at Mass, we also have learned that providing for live streaming of Mass is a very consoling service for those who are unable to be physically present for Mass with the community of their home parish. This is especially true for funeral Masses where many loved ones are unable to be present because of the difficulty of travel from faraway places. I would like to restate my request that parishes consider maintaining this practice of live streaming for the sake of including shut-ins and those who are unable to be physically present.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

+ Michael F. Olson

Most Reverend Michael F. Olson, STD, MA
Bishop of Fort Worth

E. James Hart

Reverend Monsignor E. James Hart
Chancellor

