



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

March 4, 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

After consultation with our presbyteral council, college of consultors, members of my staff, and in monitoring COVID-19 transmission levels within the Diocese of Fort Worth and based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other medical consultants, I write to inform you of a change in our current protocols for the celebration of Mass.

Our current environment is one with two important factors: 1) the ready availability of vaccines which in most cases limit symptoms, and 2) treatment protocols and medicines now exist that minimize likelihood of hospitalization. Thus, beginning this weekend, the wearing of face masks during Mass and at the distribution of Communion is now **optional and left to the discretion of the ordinary or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion**.

While mask usage is now optional, it is still required for ministers of Holy Communion to sanitize hands before and after the distribution of Holy Communion. It is also necessary to sanitize surfaces as has been our practice. I also strongly encourage that good judgment be used in maintaining physical distancing among people so as to reduce the chance of transmitting any communicable disease.

This having been stated, I would also remind us that the use of masks reduces the transmission of fluids when expectorating and have a positive effect in preventing the spread of any communicable disease. It is important for us to be mindful that the immune-compromised elderly and others with co-morbidity remain the most vulnerable to the grave effects of COVID-19 and its variants along with any communicable disease.

Concern for other people should inform the decision that parishioners make regarding the wearing of masks. 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.

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.

THE CATHOLIC CENTER

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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 especially for funerals and weddings.

I am grateful for the generosity of each and all of you during this time that has required a more intentional practice of the virtue of solidarity and compassion for our neighbors. Please be assured of my prayers for you during this season of Lent as I seek the same from you on my behalf. I remain,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Michael F. Olson". The signature is written in a cursive style.

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "E. James Hart". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Reverend Monsignor E. James Hart
Chancellor/Moderator of the Curia