



OFFICE *of the* BISHOP

August 6, 2021  
Feast of the Transfiguration

Dear Reverend Monsignors, Priests, and Deacons,

As mentioned in Tuesday's meeting with our priests, I am now writing to communicate adjustments to our COVID mitigation strategies. These adjustments come in response to the current increase in COVID-19 cases, the new CDC guidance and the advice of our local medical consultants.

The Diocese is now **recommending**, not requiring, masks for parishioners over the age of five during all indoor liturgies and other indoor parish events. Although recent evidence has shown that breakthrough infections can occur in vaccinated individuals, and that vaccinated individuals can be contagious, it is also the case that infection is less likely for vaccinated individuals, and the risk of severe symptoms is much less likely. There are still ample benefits to vaccination, and our Catholic moral teaching consistently affirms the value of vaccination both for individuals and for the common good.

Additionally, masks will be required for all clergy and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion during the distribution of communion. You are not obligated to apply this change immediately, but please enact this policy by the weekend of August 14-15. Since we are recommending masks for the larger congregation, please consider ways in which you can set a positive example for parishioners by using a mask at prudent moments, such as during the consecration if hosts are not covered, while a server is holding the missal before you, during processional and recessional, and while greeting parishioners before or after Mass.

Most importantly, as you have throughout the pandemic, please continue to witness to a spirit of unity and selfless care for others. By recommending masks we are allowing for more individual and communal discernment in mitigation strategies, but the most important thing is to exercise prudence and concern for the most vulnerable among us during this time. We will continue to monitor the public health situation closely, and if the situation continues to deteriorate we will take more stringent precautions.

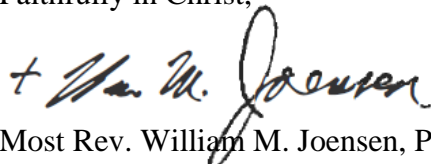
Beyond this update other policies are being sustained that I would like to draw to your attention. All current policies are posted to our regathering webpage [here](#).

Important sustained policies:

- Servers, hymnals, choirs, and collections all continue to be permitted.
- Social gatherings are still permitted, and attention should be given to COVID mitigation during planning.
- The Sign of Peace is permitted, and non-physical exchanges remain the norm.
- The Sunday Obligation remains in place, although there are always individual cases where in conscience a person might opt not to be present at Sunday Mass. Please help parishioners discern if these conditions obtain.
- Cleaning and sanitation is still required once a week, and after any known positive COVID case.
- Continue to communicate that individuals who feel sick should stay at home.
- Pastors retain the discretion to take more precautions, such as requiring masks at certain Masses, reserving spaces for greater social distancing, or having Mass outdoors. I am grateful for all you can do to accompany and support those parishioners who are particularly vulnerable to and concerned by this recent increase in COVID-19 cases.

Let us continue to pray for a swift end to this pandemic, and for all those who are suffering during this time, including our weary health care providers. As always, I am so grateful for the countless ways you serve and sacrifice on behalf of the people of the Diocese, those many sacrifices both visible and hidden. May St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, continue to protect all households in our parishes, and ourselves.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Wm. M. Joensen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "W".

Most Rev. William M. Joensen, Ph.D.  
Bishop of Des Moines