

11-19-20

Dear Monsignor or Father or Deacon:

I hope that this email finds you doing well and staying healthy in these uncertain COVID times. We are all aware that many people's health fears and anxieties are at a heightened level these days, and reasonably so. Quite possibly you are experiencing some of the same. Please know of my support and prayers, and Bishop Persico's as well.

As you know, the Commonwealth issued new COVID-19 directives on November 17. The purpose of this email is to provide you with an update into how these new directives will impact us.

1. NO MODIFICATIONS TO LITURGICAL PROTOCOLS AT THIS TIME:

Consistent with past practice, the new Pennsylvania directives of November 17 do not affect the celebration of the liturgy. As a result, the diocesan protocols currently in place remain unchanged.

As a reminder, those protocols provide pastors with a considerable range of options regarding the use of liturgical ministers, music, spacing in the pews, etc. Now might be a good time to reconsider all of these options, and to pull back wherever it seems prudent. Those decisions are left to pastors in collaboration with their staff.

With the support of the Presbyteral Council expressed at last week's meeting, Bishop Persico does not foresee returning to a diocesan-wide suspension of public Masses. Instead, if the situation deteriorates further, the decision to temporarily suspend public Masses is left to each pastor in collaboration with his staff and after having consulted the dean. The priest's own health concerns need to be given proper weight in that decision, and the Bishop will support whatever decision is made. Any decision to temporarily suspend public worship should be communicated to the Chancery, so that we can stay informed as to what is happening in various places.

In all of this, the consistent thought is to safeguard the health of parishioners and clergy, pulling back from things where it is prudent to do so, while continuing to minister as best we are able in the changing situation.

2. PA DIRECTIVES AFFECTING THE PARISH OFFICE AND OTHER WORK PLACES:

Note: As the employer of parish staff and other personnel, the pastor or parish administrator will need to apply the following directives within his parish. The information provided here is meant to be a helpful guide and does not constitute an official explanation of the law. Please refer questions to your human resource agent or to Jim Tometsko.

A. UPDATED MASK MANDATE

a). What is the new directive?

By order issued November 17, 2020, the Commonwealth is now requiring the wearing of a mask or face shield indoors or in an enclosed space, where another person or persons who are not members of the individual's household are present in the same space, irrespective of physical distance. This order went into effect on November 18.

b). What does this mean for parish offices and other work places?

Whenever in the presence of another person and in all public areas, clergy and parish employees and visitors are to wear masks at all times. An individual who is alone in his or her own office may choose to wear a mask or not, but only when alone.

B. UPDATED TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS No longer a recommendation; these are now obligatory.

a). What is the new directive?

By order issued November 17, 2020, the Wolf administration is requiring that travelers entering Pennsylvania from other countries and states, as well as Pennsylvanians who are returning home from other countries or states, have a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours prior to entering the Commonwealth or quarantine for 14 days upon entry into Pennsylvania.

This order becomes effective on Friday, November 20, 2020. This order is a requirement and is enforceable under the Disease Prevention and Control Law. It applies to people coming from or going to ALL 50 states.

b). What does this mean for you and your parish employees and personnel?

Individuals who leave Pennsylvania must get tested within 72 hours prior to re-entering the Commonwealth. If they test positive, or are unable to get a test, or are waiting for test results, or choose not to get a test, they must quarantine for 14 days upon arrival in Pennsylvania or until they receive a negative test result prior to interacting with anyone outside of their travel group or household.

c). Is the quarantine period with or without pay?

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), federal law as of March 18, 2020, generally provides that when an employee is unable to work because the employee is quarantined due to government order or on the advice of a health care provider, that employee is entitled to: two weeks (up to 80 hours) of paid sick leave at the employee's regular rate of pay.

Please note, however, that the FFCRA hours are a one-time event. Once an employee has used the allotted 80 hours of FFCRA paid sick time, reimbursement or wages for any subsequent quarantine are not covered by the law.

If you have specific questions regarding this information, please contact me, or Father Chris Singer, or Jim Tometsko.

Thanks for all that you are doing to provide a shepherd's care. Let us continue to support each other in prayer. Stay safe!

Msgr. Edward M. Lohse
Vicar General