

August 11, 2021

Dear Monsignor or Father or Deacon:

I am writing at the request of Bishop Persico to update you on our COVID-19 protocols for the public celebration of Mass.

The overarching principle upon which our protocols are based is as follows: **Bishop Persico intends to maintain public worship throughout the diocese while at the same time asking us to keep people as safe as possible.**

With that as the starting point, the recent surge in the Delta variant has precipitated two slight modifications to our protocols, effective as of this weekend, August 14-15, 2021:

1. A broader-reaching encouragement:

We continue to strongly encourage anyone who is not vaccinated to wear a mask while in church. In addition, we are now encouraging everyone (excluding the celebrant) in counties where there is a substantial or high rate of COVID-19 transmission to wear a mask while in church regardless of their vaccination status, while the situation persists.

2. A new requirement:

For their own protection and that of others, everyone (both clergy and lay) who is distributing Holy Communion is to wear a mask while doing so. This requirement applies only to the time when distributing Holy Communion and not to the rest of the Mass. The related requirements remain in place that those distributing must also be vaccinated and must sanitize their hands prior to distribution.

You can find these two modifications expressed in the Bishop's new decree of August 11, 2021. They are indicated in red (see attached).

As a reminder, the rest of the protocols continue in force (see attached decree). The following continue to be suspended: distribution of the Precious Blood, placement of holy water in the fonts, use of hymnals stored in the pews, use of collection baskets which pass or are moved among the assembly, offertory processions, etc. There should be a purificator or ablution bowl along with hand sanitizer at Communion stations in case those distributing the Eucharist need to sanitize their fingers between communicants.

Pastors know the concrete situation of their parishes and parishioners. Pastors who wish to put in place additional measures for their parishes may do more than what is listed in the protocols, but they should not do less.

Let us pray that the surge from the Delta variant is short-lived, and that no additional measures will be needed to guard against it. In the meantime, thank you once again for all that you are doing to shepherd the Lord's people during these very difficult times. Please be careful of your own health, and if you are in need of anything or have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me or Fr. Chris Singer or Fr. Matt Kujawinski.

Sincerely,
Msgr. Edward M. Lohse
Vicar General