



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF SCRANTON

300 WYOMING AVENUE
SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA 18503-1279

August 6, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Caring for the health, safety and spiritual well-being of all parishioners – and our entire community – has been my priority since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Diocese of Scranton has made every effort to implement best practices in public health – and has been continuously evaluating policies, monitoring data and consulting with healthcare experts. I want to assure you that these efforts continue to this day.

It is now evident that this global health crisis continues to linger – especially with the delta variant -- which medical experts explain is more infectious, and can spread more aggressively, than previous virus strains.

As the Diocese of Scranton looks forward to welcoming the faithful back to the celebration of Mass with the reinstatement of our obligation as Christians to worship on Sundays and Holy Days beginning August 15, it is imperative that we maintain the accessibility of the Eucharist in a safe environment.

I am strongly recommending that all parishioners wear a mask while attending Mass – regardless of vaccination status. While masks will not be mandated in our parishes at this time, we must all continue to be vigilant against this emerging health threat. In fact, as Catholics, we have a responsibility to protect our friends and neighbors. In order to safeguard our community, I have also requested that altar servers wear masks and all Priests, Deacons and Extraordinary Ministers return to wearing masks during the distribution of Holy Communion.

I also encourage everyone to continue good hygiene habits and follow the example of Pope Francis, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and all Pennsylvania Bishops, in receiving a COVID-19 vaccination.

While I, along with your pastor, look forward to welcoming you back to experience the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, individuals who have serious health conditions or concerns will still not be obligated to attend Mass. By longstanding Church law, the Sunday obligation does not apply to those who are:

- Sick
- Have a serious health risk
- In a household with those at risk
- Primary caregivers to those at risk
- Have serious anxiety or concerns about being in a large-group setting due to COVID-19
- Unable to attend Mass in person

As an act of charity, anyone who believes they might have COVID-19 or one of its variants should stay home.

Those who are legitimately excused from Mass on Sundays and Holy Days are encouraged to spend time in prayer, meditating on the death and Resurrection of the Lord, reading the sacred Scriptures, and uniting themselves to Christ. They are also encouraged to watch televised or livestream Masses.

As we continue to respond to the invitation of Jesus to come to Him, I invite all the faithful to safely return to Mass to have an intimate encounter with the Lord.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

† *Joseph C. Bambera*

Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L.
Bishop of Scranton