



July 9, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Since early June, the number of cases of COVID-19 in Oklahoma have increased rapidly, affecting many of our family members, friends and more than a dozen priests, some of whom have spent time in the hospital. This increase has prompted civic leaders and health authorities to seek further protections to slow the spread of the virus as we head into summer. Thankfully, most of our cases have not been severe or resulted in loss of life. For that I am incredibly grateful. To keep our parishioners and our priests safe, we must continue to be vigilant in our efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our parish communities.

With that in mind, and after much discussion and prayer, I am requiring masks (shields or face coverings) to be worn by all priests, deacons, parishioners, church staff, volunteers and anyone serving in ministry at public Masses, parish events and gatherings, and in parish offices starting Saturday, July 11, until further notice. This precaution applies to anyone age 6 and older. Masks already are required to be worn by chancery staff members at the Catholic Pastoral Center and during Daily Mass at the Saint Francis de Sales Chapel.

It is important to remember that this latest precaution is temporary. We will continue to monitor the health crisis and adjust implementation of the procedures accordingly. Please note that the precautions we have been following since the resumption of public Mass in May remain in place as does the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. If you are not comfortable attending Mass in person, I encourage you to consider live-streamed Masses.

The guidelines are available on the archdiocesan website (archokc.org/mass) in English and Spanish. I am asking all pastors to continue to implement these guidelines with renewed diligence. I ask that everyone follow them as carefully as possible, especially the importance of social distancing and proper hand sanitizing.

If a staff member at a church, including a priest, is known to have been exposed to the virus, becomes ill or tests positive, several steps must be taken. The pastor must inform parishioners immediately of the illness. Information also should be provided on possible exposure to the virus even if test results are not immediately available. If ill or with a positive result, the priest or staff member must quarantine for 14 days and, when necessary, parish offices can be closed and public Mass suspended. Parishioners are asked to not attend Mass or any church-related function if they do not feel well or are experiencing any of the symptoms of COVID-19.

Thank you for your cooperation and patience with these precautions as we do our part to assist in reducing the spread of the virus. It is a small act of charity that promotes the health and well-being of others and can help Oklahoma and the nation eventually emerge from this crisis.

By following these guidelines carefully, we will be able to continue to celebrate public Masses and receive the nourishment we need through Holy Communion.

Jesus promised that the Father would pour out his own Spirit upon us to guide, direct and protect us through all trials and tribulations. The gift of the Holy Spirit assures us of God's continued presence in our lives. No matter the circumstance, he is with us. Please know you are in my prayers as we work together to keep our parish communities safe.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul S. Coakley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City