

## Message from Bishop Joensen

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Nov. 11, 2020

[communications@dmdiocese.org](mailto:communications@dmdiocese.org)

Dear Friends in Christ,

I am acutely aware that in the State of Iowa and in our country the incidence of infection, hospitalization, and mortality due to the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 is rising significantly just as we as enter the holiday and winter seasons. I conclude that it is necessary to **require** face masks or coverings at all public Masses, sacramental celebrations, and other events in Church buildings in the Diocese of Des Moines, effective immediately. This requirement extends through February 2, 2021 (The Feast of the Presentation), at which time it will be reviewed. I have taken this critical step so we may responsibly continue to gather around the Eucharistic altar – the source and summit of our faith – and worship together.

The Eucharist is the pearl of great price won at the cost of Christ's saving sacrifice on the Cross. The personal and communal sacrifice entailed in wearing a mask, while it involves for many a yielding of our will and personal preference and comfort, pales in comparison to the privilege of participating in the Mass. Our ability to continue to experience God's grace in the sacramental life of the Church is directly linked to our ability to mitigate the risk of COVID infections; therefore, a mask requirement is prudent at this time. Moreover, simple charity obliges us to take into account the physical and psychic health of others as a way to ensure that worship is relatively safe and accessible to as many parishioners as possible. None of us wants to be the cause for someone else to withdraw or refrain from Mass attendance because certain members of a congregation fail to employ this basic means of protection for our neighbor.

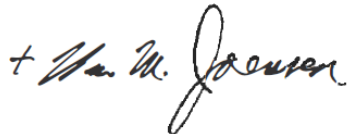
This diocesan requirement applies to all those over the age of five, who do not have a medical or psychological condition prohibiting mask use. A personal preference opposed to mask use, or the belief that masks are not effective, does not qualify as a condition exempting one from mask use.

If parishioners are unsure whether an exemption applies to them, they should consult with their pastor who can assist in discernment.

The Diocese asks parishes to communicate this requirement to all parishioners, and to ensure observance by the faithful. Again, the one thing needful is to be able to place ourselves at Jesus' feet, to heed his command to take, eat, and drink his sacramental Body and Blood. We are consoled and revived in our belief that Jesus continues to meet us in the Eucharist; we continue to support each other as the family of God, and we remain in God's providential care. As Cardinal Robert Sarah has reminded us in his letter, *Let Us Return to the Eucharist with Joy*, "The Church will continue to cherish the human person as a whole. She bears witness to hope, invites us to trust in God, recalls that earthly existence is important, but much more important is eternal life: sharing the same life with God for eternity is our goal, our vocation."

The Sunday Mass obligation remains suspended. For those who are not able to attend Mass during the pandemic because of personal vulnerability, God's infinite grace and mercy remain abundantly available.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Wm. M. Joensen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

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