



Diocese of Worcester
Office of the Bishop
49 Elm Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

November 16, 2020

Dear Monsignor/Father,

In recent days I have become increasingly concerned with the accelerating rate of the COVID-19 virus in the Diocese of Worcester. Indeed, during the past two weeks, four priests, a deacon and several lay volunteers have been either diagnosed positive for the virus or have been quarantined due to an unprotected exposure to a COVID+ person.

These unfortunate instances give us occasion to recommit ourselves to taking our responsibility to our people seriously in mitigating the spread of COVID-19. The epidemiological community is unanimous in predicting that this winter surge will get much worse before it gets better and the decisions you make in the coming weeks are critically serious for the health of your elderly and vulnerable parishioners.

I would, therefore, urge you to take the guidelines provided to you in *Orantes* seriously. Every priest is to directly remind the people at every Mass of the importance of maintaining social distance and wearing a mask. Commonly touched surfaces are to be sanitized after every Mass, and parishioners should be encouraged to go from their car to their pew and back again without stopping to visit with others outside their household. In addition, the prohibition of choirs, processions, etc. should be followed scrupulously. I cannot emphasize how important the observance of these protocols are to keeping our churches open and our people safe.

Should you or a member of your staff be diagnosed as COVID+ I would ask that you immediately inform either Father Dennis O'Brien or Monsignor James Moroney so that the Diocese can provide the resources you and your parish need to successfully navigate this challenging virus.

Finally, please join me in praying for the successful approval and quick distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. Your faithful implementation of the guidelines we have developed with experts throughout this pandemic have resulted in keeping our people safe and closer to the Lord. In the words of our Diocesan *Prayer in Time of Pandemic*, may the Lord "give us the wisdom to do what is right and the faith to endure this hour."

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester