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DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH ANNOUNCES UPDATED COVID-19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS

In a continuing commitment to care for the health, safety, and spiritual well-being of the faithful in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Bishop David Zubik announces the following updated COVID-19 Safety Protocols for diocesan parishes. **These practices are effective January 7, 2022, and are to be continued until further notice.**

The diocesan protocol updates are based on the dramatic surge in community spread of the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus, and will be re-evaluated on an ongoing basis as more information from the CDC and local healthcare officials becomes available.

“As Christians and community members, we have a responsibility to protect ourselves, each other and our neighbors. When we all follow these steps, it will slow this virus, help us keep our churches open and move us toward the day when we can once again associate with others more freely.”

Pope Francis, Bishop Zubik, and other Catholic bishops across the world continue to encourage all who are eligible to get COVID vaccines and booster shots as an act of love for all people, especially the most vulnerable.

Effective immediately and until further notice:

- As leaders in their parishes and in the community, unless extraordinary circumstances warrant otherwise, all priests and deacons must wear masks during the celebration of Mass at all times, including when preaching and at the altar.
- Everyone entrusted with the distribution of Holy Communion must wear a mask. They must also sanitize their hands immediately prior to distribution, and throughout distribution as necessary.
- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, servers, greeters, ushers, lectors and cantors, must wear a mask. In addition, faith formation leaders, catechists, and those who visit the sick or homebound must wear a mask.
- Choir members must wear masks at all times.
- The presentation of the gifts is suspended until further notice.

- As already directed, the practice of shaking hands to offer the Sign of Peace is suspended until further notice.
- As also previously directed, those attending Mass are urgently encouraged to wear masks, regardless of vaccination status. Based on their age, health history, and family considerations, parishioners must make prudent decisions regarding getting vaccinated, wearing a mask, and staying home if not feeling well. As a reminder, anyone who is sick, feels they are at risk, or is a primary caregiver, as well as those who have serious anxiety about being part of a large group at this time are excused from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass (CCC #2181).
- It is strongly recommended that any parish events outside of Holy Mass are to either be cancelled, re-scheduled, or be held virtually.
- Livestream Mass options are to continue, to serve those who are not able to come to Mass in-person.

“I am grateful for the faith, love and patience that our people have shown throughout this pandemic,” said Bishop Zubik. “Please join me in prayer for all of those who are ill and who have lost loved ones. We also pray that God will continue to guide the medical researchers and health care professionals to bring about a swift end to this pandemic.”