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CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG

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Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania Prioritize Safety as Mass Obligation Resumes

HARRISBURG, Pa. – Jesus commanded his followers to care for the sick and to bring physical and spiritual healing to everyone. In that spirit, the Catholic bishops of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania have issued this statement:

Caring for the health, safety and spiritual wellbeing of parishioners and their communities is a priority of all the bishops of Pennsylvania. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, dioceses have made every effort to implement best practices in public health for every aspect of parish life. Each diocese is continuously re-evaluating coronavirus mitigation efforts, frequently consulting with state and federal healthcare experts and constantly monitoring data. Diocesan leaders are listening to input from parishioners, including those with medical expertise, as cases of the Delta and other new variants are surging.

It now seems evident that this global health crisis could linger for months or years to come. Our call as shepherds is to provide the Eucharist in a safe environment. To that end, each diocesan bishop will communicate to the faithful, asking them to prioritize their own health and the health of their neighbors and faith communities.

As previously announced, the bishops are reinstating the obligation to attend Mass in person on Sundays and holy days beginning on Sunday, Aug. 15, 2021. However, by longstanding Church law, this 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 or have been exposed 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 investigate the numerous options to view broadcasts and streams of Mass, which are continuing across the state.

While masks are not currently mandated, each parishioner is strongly encouraged to make a responsible decision about the use of masks and vaccinations following in the examples of all Pennsylvania Bishops, Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI who have all been vaccinated for the common good.

Our coronavirus mitigation efforts will continue to evolve, based on the most up-to-date public health information. Each bishop will continue to communicate with the faithful as changes become necessary.

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