



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP  
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### **DECREE**

Just over a month ago, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, I issued what I hoped would be the last of these “pandemic DECREES”, as the drastic decline in the infection rate of the COVID 19 virus, together with the availability of a vaccine, gave all of West Tennessee a hope for better days, safer days. What a troubling difference we have seen, just a month later. Today, all of West Tennessee is experiencing great increases in the rate of infection from the novel coronavirus and its variants. This Friday, in Shelby County, there will be a re-issuing of a mandate requiring the “wearing of facial coverings” in public facilities (this will include our diocesan offices and parish centers, but not in our places of worship).

The infectious and dangerous variants of COVID 19 are a reality for our public health. And, the relatively low percentage of vaccinated teens and adults in West Tennessee is a reality. Because of this, I issue this new DECREE, that takes effect on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August.

As of Saturday, **the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 2021**, *most all* of the restrictions and instructions offered in the previous “COVID 19 DECREES” are removed, though the wearing of a facial covering during our celebration of holy Mass is strongly encouraged. It will be up to each Pastor and Administrator to communicate to his parish community how this removal of most of the previous restrictions will affect the public worship of God at Holy Mass.

I encourage all to return to the practices that were once restricted, while keeping in mind the CDC guidelines: the availability and use of Holy Water; the Offertory procession of the gifts given by the community; the offering of some sign of the exchange of Christ’s peace before the reception of the *Living Bread*; the offering of the *Living Bread* in the hand or on the tongue, as each communicant chooses; socials, gatherings and ongoing formation experiences; service projects; evangelization activities, etc.

But, given the strong COVID 19 infection rates in all of West Tennessee, I ask that all Pastors and Administrators withhold the offering of the cup of blessing (Chalices for Holy Communion) until further notice.

I encourage a continued eye to public health and public safety, making concrete our following of the Golden Rule of the Risen Lord (Leviticus 19.18, 34; Matthew 7.12; Luke 6.31). And, as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have been vaccinated as a work of love, I encourage all not vaccinated to seek this benefit, for the common good of all. Please remember that:

1. I strongly encourage the use of facial coverings for Holy Mass, with a spirit of tolerance and respect for those who choose not to utilize them.
2. Hand sanitation is a good thing; I encourage its availability and use in the parish to purify the hands of the faithful before and after the Rite of Communion. Clerics and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are also to take the upmost care in utilizing hand sanitizer.

3. As has been mentioned in previous decrees, please note that, “If participation in the Eucharist celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful...devote themselves to pray for the suitable period of time alone, as a family...(canon 1248)”. With the continued presence of this infectious coronavirus (and variants) among our people, any health precondition that makes a person, parent, or health provider more vulnerable to COVID 19 would constitute a grave cause mentioned in the above canon.

Let us continue to thank God for *the gift of life* and for those medical and service providers that have been so responsive during this health crisis. So too, we must remember to give thanks to God for the researchers, first-responders and *our teachers*...heroes all.

This Decree is given on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August and takes effect on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 2021. I am yours, in the light and love of the Risen Lord,

+ David P. Talley

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