



+ August 18, 2021

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

May the love and joy of our Lord be with you. As we continue to address challenging issues and difficulties with the pandemic, I encourage you to turn to our Lord Jesus and to each other for guidance, accompaniment and support.

Recently, we have had a significant increase of COVID exposures at parishes with both unvaccinated and vaccinated individuals. I asked the COVID-19 taskforce to provide more data to inform you in how to effectively respond to the Delta variant. I know we all agree that we must provide a safe environment for everyone to return to in-person Mass, yet I am mindful that many of you have requested more information to cooperate with the guidance we are giving. It is with this in mind that I write to you today about two issues.

First, please strongly encourage mask wearing as the expectation at Mass. As a parish staff, it is crucial that you set a sterling example, not only in wearing a mask yourself, but in the tone and language you use when responding to questions about them. Please dampen any politicization around masking, which has nothing to do with politics, but is a scientifically proven way to effectively reduce spread. Masking remains a potent way of screening particles in the air, keeping us from touching our mouths and noses and keeping surfaces in our spaces cleaner. Provide a protected space in the main church for people who wish to sit socially distanced. These are simple requests, which are easy to implement and demonstrate our desire to protect everyone.

Second, I highly encourage everyone to be vaccinated. Our faith does not forbid us from receiving the vaccine. Today a video was released with Pope Francis encouraging everyone to be vaccinated. Please watch and [share this video](#) with your community.

Regarding religious exemptions to any COVID-19 vaccine mandate, the Archdiocese of Seattle is instructing its clergy not to provide or sign documents claiming a religious exemption. Similarly, it is not our place to sign any exemptions based on personal conscience. That is between each individual and their employer. According to Governor Inslee's proclamation, if an individual is seeking such an exemption, it is sufficient for that individual to state their own reasons.

As you decline these requests, be gentle and pastoral with those who ask. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Affirm that the Church also emphasizes the voluntary nature of vaccinations. Share your desire to accompany them and encourage them to consider what other steps they will take to protect the vulnerable and look after the common good.

Thank you for your dedication to your ministry. In this time of great divisiveness, our Church can provide unity and remind people we are one family in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10). We can help shift the mentality away from the individualistic “me” to the communal “we” by reminding everyone that our actions impact the whole community – and the world – during this global pandemic. United, we can work together to share our diverse gifts for the good of God’s kingdom.

Please pray for me during this time and be assured of my continued prayers for you. As always, I remain,

In the Heart of Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul D. Etienne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, circular initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Most Rev. Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Archbishop of Seattle