



## ARCHDIOCESE OF LOUISVILLE

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OFFICE of the ARCHBISHOP

August 24, 2021

Dear Father,

May God bless you! We have received some questions in the last several days after my latest update regarding the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation and the change in the mask policy for worship and parish office functions, meetings and programming. I also want to clarify our stance on religious exemptions.

I want to reiterate the directive about masking. Both parishioners and employees who are not yet fully vaccinated are required to wear masks at Sunday worship and in any parish meetings, functions, or events. Our Personnel Office is available to answer questions or provide guidance if you have specific questions about employees.

Because you may receive questions in light of recent rulings of the Kentucky Supreme Court and the Governor's rescinded executive order, it is important to realize that this mask directive is grounded in our concern for the common good in light of rising cases of COVID-19 and in guidance from public health authorities.

As I shared with you in December of 2020, the Holy See and the chairs of the USCCB Committees on Doctrine and Pro-Life Activities carefully reviewed the ethical use of the COVID-19 vaccines that are available in the United States and communicated that their use is morally permissible. I am again copying the document from Bishops Kevin Rhoades and Archbishop Joseph Naumann for your review. Their summary (citing statistics from December of 2020) states: "The world is currently facing a health crisis. The number of deaths from COVID-19 is now almost one and a half million worldwide. In the United States, the toll is approaching 300,000. Given the urgency of this crisis, the lack of available alternative vaccines, and the fact that the connection between an abortion that occurred decades ago and receiving a vaccine produced today is remote, inoculation with the new COVID-19 vaccines in these circumstances can be morally justified."

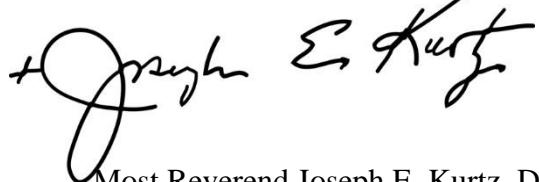
In light of the clarification from our Holy Father, Pope Francis, the Holy See's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Doctrine and Pro-Life Committees, the Archdiocese of Louisville will not issue religious exemptions for the COVID-19 vaccines, and I ask priests not to issue religious exemptions based upon an individual's Catholic faith.

We always respect decisions based upon properly formed consciences, and pastors can assist parishioners in forming their consciences. One of the factors in making such a judgement is the willingness to accept the consequence of a decision. Thus, those parishioners who in conscience will not take the vaccine should be encouraged to take extra precautions, including masking and other measures recommended by public health authorities.

Our decisions about all of these difficult issues are not made in a vacuum. We listen to public health authorities and our civic leaders, and we seek the advice of competent moral theologians. We will continue to do so as new issues present themselves.

We are all dealing with a lot these days! Please know of my prayers for you as you seek to lead with compassion, care, and fidelity to the Gospel.

Fraternally yours in our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "+Joseph E. Kurtz".

Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.  
Archbishop of Louisville

Attachment (1)