



December 21, 2021

Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Saint Cloud

214 3RD AVENUE SOUTH - BOX 1248
ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA 56302
TELEPHONE (320) 251-2340
FAX (320) 258-7618

Dear brother:

In these final days of the Advent season, we continue to wait in joyful anticipation of the birth of our Savior. The arrival of the Christ child brings joy and hope to all the world. I pray that your Christmas season will be filled with peace and many blessings for you and for those you serve.

Currently, as you know, the coronavirus pandemic is surging again around the world. The counties that comprise our diocese are experiencing high transmission rates. The number of COVID cases requiring medical care is straining the resources of CentraCare and other medical providers in central Minnesota. They are asking for help from faith community leaders to keep people healthy and safe. The fast spread of the omicron variant and the arrival of flu season add additional layers of concern.

Christmas will be a time when our churches see more people coming to worship. I want to ensure that we take reasonable precautions to keep people healthy. It's important that we do this as trusted members of our communities. But it is even more important for us to do this as Catholics whose faith calls us to protect human life and care for one another, especially those who are vulnerable, by making responsible choices.

• **It is my expectation that you will follow all diocesan protocols with regard to parish/ACC ministries and Catholic schools.** It is imperative that pastors with Catholic schools support their principals in their work to keep school communities safe. The most-up-to-date diocesan guidance can be found at <https://stcdio.org/coronavirus-update>.

• **I encourage everyone who is eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters.** Vaccinations offer an increased level of protection from the virus and reduce the likelihood of a person needing hospitalization if they contract the virus. This reduces the strain on our medical system to ensure it is able meet the needs of its COVID as well as non-COVID patients.

• **I encourage you to strongly recommend to parishioners attending Mass and larger indoor events/meetings to wear masks and practice physical-distancing as much as possible.** Utilizing larger rooms or conducting meetings online or as a hybrid (a combination of online and in-person) can help limit the spread of the virus.

• **Please continue your sanitization procedures** and consider providing hand sanitizer at the entrance and exits of your churches if you do not already do so.

These measures will help to protect the public and our parishioners. Please pray for all those who have been impacted by the virus and for the protection of our medical professionals who risk their own health every day to serve us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,


+Donald J. Kettler
Bishop of Saint Cloud