



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

August 10, 2021

Feast of St. Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr

To All Faithful of the Diocese of St. Augustine,

The leadership of the diocese has had to make difficult decisions regarding the safety of our children due to the rapid increase of covid-19 cases, dangerous variants that have come into play, and the hesitancy of people to get vaccinated. Our revised safety protocols have nothing to do with politics but everything to do with the reality we face today. Children under the age of 12 and older are contracting the virus and its variants at increasing rates. The vaccine is not available to our younger population, making them especially vulnerable to serious illness and others who come into contact with them.

The protocols released yesterday afternoon are a temporary measure to protect our students, teachers, and staff. No one likes wearing masks, and we want to return to mask-free schools as quickly as possible.

The diocese encompasses 17 counties of North Florida. The superintendent of Catholic schools and his advisors will continue to monitor the positivity rates in these counties weekly and provide a status report at www.dosaeducation.org/covid-19. Until your county has a positivity rate of 10 percent or less, masks will be required. It is a small price to pay to protect our loved ones and others.

Everyone needs to do their part in fighting this killer virus. If you haven't been vaccinated, and can, don't wait. Too many people who have resisted getting vaccinated find themselves in hospitals fighting for their lives. Those that survive have stated they wish they had gotten the vaccine.

We ask that you work with your school leadership and join our efforts to keep your children safe as we begin a new school year. May God continue to bless us.

Sincerely yours,

+ v. r. Estévez

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.
Bishop of St. Augustine