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**NEWS RELEASE**

**Archbishop John C. Wester Announces  
Revised Protocols for COVID-19 Pandemic  
Effective February 18, 2022**

ALBUQUERQUE – Friday, February 18, 2022—IMMEDIATE RELEASE—Archbishop John C. Wester and the COVID-19 Response Team has issued the following revised protocols during the current COVID-19 Pandemic:

- From this day forward, masks will be optional in church. However, they remain strongly recommended, especially for those over 65, those with medical conditions that make them more vulnerable to the virus, those caring for persons in the previous two categories, and those who are unvaccinated.
- Eucharistic Ministers must wear a mask while distributing Holy Communion. They should also sanitize their hands just before distribution.
- Choir members may sing without masks. The limit of 8 to 10 choir members allowed to sing at Mass is no longer in force. The other choir protocols (such as 3 to 4 feet for social distancing, sterilization of the choir area, no sharing of music, the use of electronic tablets instead of paper music, and no sharing of paper music if used) are still advised. The congregation is also allowed to sing.
- The Sunday Mass obligation remains suspended. There is no obligation to attend Sunday Mass in church until further notice.
- Those whose age and/or medical condition render them more vulnerable to the virus are recommended to pray at home on Sunday, preferably taking advantage of live-streamed Masses.
- The Catholic Schools Office has lifted the requirement to wear masks at school. The schools will continue to encourage safety protocols, such as covering mouth when coughing and sneezing, washing hands, and continuing with the regular disinfecting of facilities. Parents have the option to have their children wear masks. Teachers and staff will also have the option to wear masks. In order to protect students and staff, those exhibiting symptoms will be sent home.
- While there is a definite reduction in the number of COVID-19 cases, we are still in a moment of transition and there is much that we do not know. The faithful are strongly encouraged to observe those protocols that reduce the possibility of infection. It is prudent to err on the side of caution and to be safe rather than sorry. **If you are sick, stay home!**
- Please continue to pray for those who have contracted the COVID-19 virus and pray for a swift end to the pandemic.--END