



**ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE
ON THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRED LITURGY
AND THE USE OF FACE COVERINGS/MASKS**

**OFFICE FOR DIVINE WORSHIP
ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA
*REVISED, SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 2020 FOR THE GREEN PHASE***

WHY ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE?

The use of face coverings/masks for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy continues to be a topic in need of regular clarification. This is especially the case with new and differing mandates with regard to face coverings/masks recently announced for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia in particular. This document responds to the many questions that surround the topic with regard to their use during the Sacred Liturgy. Hereafter, the use of the term masks also refers to face coverings.

You can find all the directives for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic at, <http://archphila.org/arise/>.

**WHAT IS THE SOURCE FOR THE ARCHDIOCESAN DIRECTIVES
FOR MASKS?**

The directives of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia with regard to masks are based on three sources: the nature of the Sacred Liturgy, directives from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

The Nature of the Sacred Liturgy

The Sacred Liturgy in all its forms—and especially the celebration of the Eucharist—is a profoundly personal and in-person encounter with a Divine Person, a Divine Event. It is the Divine Event of the death and resurrection of the Lord—not just recalling something that happened in the past but as it actually happens in the here and now. Jesus, the Son of God made man and now risen from the dead, assembles us to have a personal part, a tangible participation, in his real offering in the Eucharist. He assembles us as his brothers and sisters and as sons and daughters of his Father. In the Eucharistic assembly, then, we are called each and every time to a unique experience of communion with Jesus and with

one another which is only further deepened when we receive Holy Communion. So all the actions of the celebration—postures, gestures, dialogues—allow for a personal and in person—tangible encounter—with Christ and one another in the Eucharist. A mask is counter-indicative to this fundamental dimension of the Sacred Liturgy. Yet, some reasonable provisions can be made in response to COVID-19 without disruption or distortion of the Sacred Mysteries.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)

The USCCB has employed an *ad hoc* group of theologians and experts in infectious disease and public health to provide guidance for the bishops for the resumption of public Masses. The work of this group was coordinated by members of the *Thomistic Institute* at the Pontifical Faculty of the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. You can find their guidelines at this link: <https://thomisticinstitute.org/covid-sacraments>.

- *This document calls for the faithful to wear cloth face coverings when they are in church. The face covering is to be removed for the reception of Holy Communion. Gloves are not be used in the distribution of Holy Communion nor for the reception of Holy Communion.*
- *The priest celebrant is not to wear a mask during the celebration of Mass.*

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

The CDC, in its most recent guidance for houses of worship, encourages but does not require the use of cloth face coverings in church. Face coverings are considered more essential when social distancing is difficult. You can find this document at this link: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>

DIRECTIVES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

Therefore, in order to promote the personal encounter with the Lord and with one another which is the nature of the Sacred Liturgy as well as to provide for the confident safety of all at Mass during this restricted period, our archdiocesan guidelines state:

- Everyone (except those 2 years of age and younger) attending Mass is strongly encouraged to wear a face covering or mask throughout the celebration of Mass and the other Sacraments, except for the reception of Holy Communion. The face covering or mask should be removed for the reception of Holy Communion.
- Priests, deacons and liturgical ministers are not expected to wear masks or gloves. Holy Communion is not to be distributed wearing gloves.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PRINCIPAL MITIGATING STANDARDS FOR COVID-19 AND MASKS?

The principal mitigating standards for COVID-19 are sanitation/hygiene, social distancing, and limiting the numbers assembled. These are the mitigating standards required by the CDC,

reinforced by the USCCB guidelines and reflected in our Archdiocesan Directives. Masks are not a required mitigating standard to limit the spread of COVID-19, especially as the contagion is significantly reduced at this point.

DO THE PRIEST CELEBRANT, DEACON, AND OTHER LITURGICAL MINISTERS—SERVERS, MUSIC MINISTERS, EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION—WEAR MASKS?

No. It is important that all of these persons wash their hands before and after Mass and are mindful of keeping a reasonable distance from one another without distorting the rites of the liturgical celebration. These are the primary ways sacred and liturgical ministers provide for their own safety and that of others.

For the priest, deacon, lector and cantor, the use of their voices is the principal way they carry out their particular role in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. They need to be clearly heard without the impediment of a mask. Also, the mask presents an immediate barrier to the personal encounter in the course of the liturgical action, especially of the priest celebrant with the members of the liturgical assembly.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

There is no moment more personal, the climax of a tangible encounter, than the action of the Body of Christ, giving the Body of Christ to the Body of Christ—the distribution of Holy Communion. Those distributing Holy Communion and those receiving are not to be masked. There is no need to shout the acclamation, *The Body of Christ*, nor the response, *Amen*. These words can be said carefully without the anything coming from the mouth.

THE MANNER OF DISTRIBUTING HOLY COMMUNION

Also, the manner of distribution is likewise an aid to safety. The paten or ciborium may be held slightly to the right, away from the path of the mouth. The Communion minister raises the sacred host to eye level and then acclaim, the *Body of Christ*. The Communion minister's mouth is below the host. The communicant responds, *Amen*, before extending hands or tongue.

Shields are not to be used for the distribution of Holy Communion.

WHEN IS THE MASK REMOVED FOR THE RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION?

Communicants are to remove the mask before they extend their hands or tongue for the reception of Holy Communion. Once the sacred Body of Christ is in the communicant's hand, he/she should not be distracted from this moment of profound intimacy by the need to remove a mask. Communicants replace the mask after they receive Holy Communion.

WHAT ABOUT ALTAR SERVERS?

School age altar servers may wear masks if this is requested by their parents.

CAN LITURGICAL MINISTERS WEAR MASKS IN THE NAVE?

When the lectors and extraordinary ministers are in the nave, outside the time they are carrying out their liturgical roles, they may wear a mask. Likewise, sacristans, ushers and greeters should wear masks in the nave.

WHAT IF A LITURGICAL MINISTER IS FEARFUL NOT TO WEAR A MASK?

If there is a fear or a reluctance on the part of the deacon and liturgical ministers to carry out their roles without a mask, they should have the freedom to step aside from these liturgical duties at this time.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE REFUSES TO WEAR A MASK IN CHURCH?

Masks are strongly encouraged, but not required. No one is to be refused a place in church because they do not have a mask. Only when social distancing is not being observed are masks required.

- The CDC Guidelines for Communities of Faith recommend: “Encourage use of cloth face coverings among staff and congregants. Face coverings are most essential when social distancing is difficult.”
- Governor Wolf has clarified that houses of worship are exempt from the current mandatory mask order in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- The CDC Guidelines state that those who are exempt from wearing a mask are: “children younger than 2 years old, anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, and anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

For additional information about wearing masks and persons with disabilities, please see the website: <http://opdarchphilly.org/> and this document: <http://opdarchphilly.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Mask.Children.Disabilities5.30.2020.pdf>

- ASL Interpreters do not wear masks during Mass.

SHOULD MASKS BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE ONE?

If it is possible, masks may be made available for those who may not have one. Masks should not be worn by more than one person. If masks are left behind in church, they should be discarded.

Thank you and God bless,
Father Dennis Gill
Director, Office for Divine Worship