



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

**OFFICE FOR DIVINE WORSHIP
ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2020**

WHY ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE?

The May 27, 2020 Webinar presented the directives for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy for the upcoming Yellow/Restricted Phase that begins June 6, 2020 in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. These same directives were published immediately after the webinar. You can find these directives at this link, <http://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Directives-Restricted-Period-5-27.pdf>.

Several questions about the use of face coverings and masks were raised during the Q&A period of the webinar and also since the publication of the directives. This document hopes to respond to these questions. Hereafter, the use of the term masks also refers to face coverings.

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-a 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.*
- *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 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. *(Please note: additional exceptions to the mask requirement are listed below.)*
- 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 required in houses of worship, especially as the contagion is significantly reduced at this point in the yellow/restricted phase.

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 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 (cf. St. Augustine)—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.

If some serious overriding reason presents itself, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may wear a mask for the distribution of Holy Communion. However, this exception, which does not apply to the priest or deacon, should be discussed with the pastor and is an exception and not the general rule.

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. They 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?

Some people—especially some persons with disabilities—are exempt from wearing a mask. No one is to be refused a place in church because they do not have a mask. Parishes should be prepared with a designated place in the nave for those who for one reason or another do not wear/have a mask.

- The CDC Guidelines state that those who are exempt from wearing a mask are: “children younger than 2 years old...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