



**UPDATE ON THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRED LITURGY
WITH THE LIFTING OF COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS
IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
AND THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA**

**OFFICE FOR DIVINE WORSHIP
ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA
WEDNESDAY, MAY 19, 2021**

Since March 2020 there has been a steady stream of directives from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for the fitting celebration of the Sacred Liturgy as adapted according to the required mitigating standards for COVID-19 mandated by the state and local governments. Throughout these many months there has been, for the most part, generous cooperation on the part of the clergy and lay faithful to give proper worship to Almighty God and to safeguard the health of one another. With the pending lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia, it will soon be possible to celebrate the Eucharist and all the Sacraments with very few exceptions in the manner prior to the pandemic.

DIFFERENT DATES FOR THE LIFTING OF COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as of Monday, May 31, 2021, lifts all building sanitation, distancing and capacity restrictions. All parishes and institutions in Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery Counties are free to lift all building sanitation, distancing and capacity restrictions on Monday, May 31, 2021.

However, the City of Philadelphia will continue to observe the current COVID-19 restrictions until Friday, June 11, 2021. All parishes and institutions in Philadelphia County are free to lift all building sanitation, distancing and capacity restrictions on Friday, June 11, 2021.

THE USE OF FACE COVERINGS AND MASKS

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issued new guidance on the use of face coverings and masks as of Thursday, May 13, 2021. According to this guidance, people who are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus no longer need to wear masks or follow social-distancing restrictions in most indoor and outdoor settings, except as required by state and local laws or other regulations.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania automatically adopted the relaxed measures on Thursday, May 13, 2021. However, the City of Philadelphia is still waiting to announce the adoption of the relaxed measures.

Therefore, parishes and institutions in Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery Counties can freely comply with the relaxed measures with regard to face coverings/masks for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. In Philadelphia County, parishes are to continue for the time being to encourage everyone in the nave of the church to wear a face covering or mask. As stated in previous liturgical directives, there is no requirement for those in the sanctuary to wear a face covering or mask.

The CDC guidance on the use of face coverings and masks does not allow for an easy observance since they apply differently to different groups of people at the same time—those fully vaccinated and those not vaccinated.

- People are to be respectful of a person's choice not to wear or to wear a face covering or mask in churches in the Archdiocese.
- The non-use or use of a face covering or mask is not to be imposed unilaterally in churches throughout the Archdiocese.
- To promote inclusion and reduce fear, it is recommended that announcements or signage indicate, in accord with the CDC guidance, that those who are fully vaccinated no longer need to wear a face covering or a mask. Those who are not fully vaccinated are strongly encouraged to wear a face covering or a mask in the nave. If a face covering or mask is worn, it is to be removed before the reception of the Body of Christ at the Communion of the Mass.
 - *Sample messaging and signage about the use of face coverings and masks will be available to parishes and institutions through the Office for Communications*

GENERAL POINTS

- The faithful continue to be dispensed by the Archbishop from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation until further notice.
 - *The faithful are to be encouraged persuasively to return to in-person Sunday Mass and the celebration of all the Sacraments, especially for those who are in good health. Pastors and their staffs should consider ways to reach out to all*

parishioners with an invitation to return to the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist.

- *For the spiritual and pastoral benefit of the faithful, several weeks notice will be provided as to when the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation will be reinstated by the Archbishop. Even when the obligation is restored, the faithful, as always, are excused legitimately from the obligation when they are seriously sick or caring for someone who is.*
- Live stream services may continue for Mass and other sacramental celebrations and devotions. *Live stream celebrations, the Sacred Liturgy celebrated in real time, are always preferred over recordings.* Pastors should plan on the gradual reduction of live stream services in favor of encouraging the irreplaceable need for the faithful to participate in the Sacred Liturgy in-person. Not every parish is expected to provide live stream services. However, those parishes that do not have this service, should direct the faithful to this possibility at the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, Philadelphia.

THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRED LITURGY

- All liturgical ministers—altar servers (vested), lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion (if needed) - should exercise their ministries as usual in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy without any exceptions or restrictions.
- Liturgical singing can take place without any restrictions. All fitting instruments may be used without any restrictions. Cantors, quartets and choirs may be employed without any restrictions. Hymnals and worship aids may be used without any restrictions.
- *Please contact the Office for Divine Worship for guidance for outdoor celebrations of Mass other liturgical celebrations.*
- **For Mass**
 - Mass is to be celebrated according to what is described in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, without exceptions or restrictions, other than what is noted here:
 - If the pastor, parochial administrator or chaplain judges it fitting, there may be the procession of Gifts during the Offertory.
 - The Invitation and the use of the Sign of Peace continues to be suspended until further notice. Alternate signs of peace should not be arbitrarily introduced.
 - The distribution of the Precious Blood continues to be suspended until further notice.
 - Priest concelebrants and assisting deacons receive the Blood of Christ typically by intinction until further notice.

- Holy Communion:
 - Holy Communion is to be distributed during the Communion Rite of each Mass and not at any other time.
 - The faithful are free to receive Holy Communion in the hand or on the tongue without stigma. There is no need for the Communion minister or the Communicant to sanitize during the distribution and reception of Holy Communion.
- **The Other Sacraments**
 - The celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick and Matrimony are to be carried out without exceptions or restrictions, as directed by the liturgical books.
 - Confessions can be heard in the confessional, anonymously or face to face, without any restrictions.
 - The Archbishop grants the faculty to priests of the Archdiocese to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation for baptized **adult** Catholics until September 1, 2021.

Please see the website of the Office for Divine Worship for the complete listing of liturgical updates during the COVID-19 Pandemic and for information on the ARISE initiative of the Archdiocese, and other resources, at <http://www.odwphiladelphia.org/home-page/news/>.

Thank you so very much for your continued generous assistance throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at fr.dgill@archphila.org.

In Christ,
 Father Dennis Gill
 Director
 Office for Divine Worship