

Diocese of Scranton
**Guidelines for Public Masses
During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Effective June 28, 2021



The Diocese of Scranton joyfully welcomes the faithful of the Diocese of Scranton to return to Masses at all of its parishes. Despite the challenges of the last year, we invite those who have not yet returned to Mass to rejoin us in person to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian life.

MASK GUIDANCE FOR MASSES

- The Pennsylvania Department of Health ended its mask mandate as of Monday, June 28, 2021. People who are not vaccinated from COVID-19, or are not fully vaccinated, are still strongly encouraged to wear masks indoors and outdoors when around others but are no longer required to do so. This means that in the parishes and institutions of the Diocese of Scranton, there is no requirement for face coverings or masks.
- Any individual is welcome to continue wearing masks at Mass if desired for personal protection and/or comfort. People are asked to be respectful of a person's choice to wear a face covering or mask in churches throughout the Diocese of Scranton.
- Given the wide range of vaccination rates among the 11 counties that make up the Diocese of Scranton, a pastor can still elect to wear a face mask during the Distribution of Holy Communion.
- Parishioners who have a pre-existing medical condition or are taking medications that weaken the immune system, should talk to their healthcare provider to discuss their activities. They may need/want to continue wearing masks and taking precautions while attending Mass.
- Parishes can post signs encouraging the use of face masks by the unvaccinated and those who are particularly vulnerable.
- At no time should church leaders demand information about vaccination status (or any other protected health information), request vaccination cards be shown on admittance, or pressure attendees in any way to show proof of vaccination. When in doubt, parishes should continue to plan their gatherings with the caution that some participants may be unvaccinated.

OTHER IMPORTANT MASS PROTOCOLS AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

- Pews no longer need to be marked for physical distancing. Parishes should remind the faithful to continue maximizing the use of space as much as possible.
- Hand sanitizer is to be made available throughout the church as much as possible.
- It is encouraged that the Sign of Peace be celebrated without physical contact.
- Distribution of the Precious Blood remains suspended at this time.

- Deacons may exercise the full function of their ministry.
- With parental permission, altar servers may assist at Mass once again. Pastors should exercise great care if using altar servers and may not necessarily have them perform all of their prior responsibilities. For example, at their discretion, a pastor may continue to use a stand to hold the *Roman Missal* to pray the orations if there might be a chance for an “unmasked” interaction.
- Liturgical singing can take place without any restrictions. Cantors, quartets and choirs may be used without any restrictions.
- At the discretion of the pastor, Holy Water fonts may be refilled and utilized. Additional attention must be paid to refresh and clean these receptacles on a regular basis. Daily cleansing would be the optimal schedule.
- Hymnals and missalettes can be returned to the pews. At the discretion of the pastor, parishes can continue to utilize printed worship aids for one-time use.
- At the discretion of the pastor, offertory collections and the Presentation of the Gifts may resume in a more customary fashion. For collections, ushers are encouraged to use baskets during any collections. Parishes can continue to use a stationary, secured basket or lock box.
- Parishes should clean and disinfect surfaces at least daily. Parishes should continue to be mindful of high-touch surfaces, including door handles, railings and bathrooms and should develop a schedule of routine cleaning and disinfection for such.
- Each parish should ensure that ventilation systems operate properly. As is feasible, parishes should continue to ensure adequate fresh air supply for all facilities and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk to children using the facility.
- Attention should continue to be paid to the length of any liturgy, considering options, especially those provided by the *Roman Missal*, to shorten the duration that the faithful will be gathered in church.
- Outdoor Masses are still permitted.
- While ongoing progress is being made to address the spread of COVID-19 with vaccinations, the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Masses on Holy Days remains suspended at this time. Every parish is encouraged to continue welcoming the faithful back to Church in earnest.