

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

Effective May 14, 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

- Individuals who are fully vaccinated from COVID-19 are not required to wear masks while attending Mass or receiving Holy Communion. Fully vaccinated individuals are welcome to continue wearing masks at Mass if desired for personal protection and/or comfort.
- Individuals who have not been fully vaccinated must continue to wear masks while attending Mass. Individuals who are not fully vaccinated must wear a mask while receiving Holy Communion but may briefly remove the mask in order to consume the Sacred Host.
- “Fully vaccinated” is defined as being two weeks after a second dose in a two-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or two weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen vaccine.
- All individuals aged two or older who are not fully vaccinated, whether indoors or outdoors, must wear a properly-fitting face covering that covers their mouth and nose while attending Mass.
- Priests, Deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are still required to wear a face mask during the Distribution of Holy Communion at this time – even if they have been fully vaccinated. This precautionary measure is due to the current wide-ranging vaccination rates among the 11 counties that make up the Diocese of Scranton.
- 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 to continue wearing masks and taking precautions while attending Mass.
- Every parish **MUST**, without exception, post signage in any entrance areas stating that anyone who is not fully vaccinated is expected to wear a mask and anyone with COVID-19 symptoms should not enter.
- Parishes **MUST**, without exception, make an announcement at the beginning of Mass that anyone who is not fully vaccinated is expected to wear a mask.
- 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.
- The Sign of Peace is to be celebrated without physical contact between non-family members.
- 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. They must wear masks during the Mass if not fully vaccinated. 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.
- A small group of singers (maximum six) may be utilized by a parish at this time only if proper physical distancing is able to be maintained. Full choirs and congregational singing are not yet able to resume.
- 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 and would need to remain masked 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. Face masks would still be required for the distribution and reception of Holy Communion.
- 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