

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

Effective August 6, 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 Diocese of Scranton strongly recommends that all parishioners wear a mask while attending Mass, regardless of vaccination status, due to the COVID-19 delta variant, which medical experts explain is more infectious and can spread more aggressively, than previous virus strains. While masks will not be mandated in our parishes at this time, we must all continue to be vigilant against this emerging health threat. As Catholics, we have a responsibility to protect our friends and neighbors.
- Altar servers need to wear a mask while performing their duties.
- Priests, Deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion must return to wearing masks during the distribution of Holy Communion. Communion ministers are also expected to wash and/or sanitize their hands prior to the distribution of Holy Communion and if their hands come into contact with a recipient's tongue.
- 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.
- 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 strongly recommending the use of face masks by all parishioners.
- 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.
- The Diocese of Scranton will reinstate the obligation to attend Mass in person on Sundays and Holy Days beginning on Sunday, August 15, 2021. However, by longstanding Church law, this obligation does not apply to those who are: sick, have a serious health risk, live in a household with those at risk, are primary caregivers to those at risk, have serious anxiety or concerns about being in a large-group setting due to COVID-19 or are unable to attend Mass in person. As an act of charity, anyone who believes they might have COVID-19 or one of its variants should also stay home.