



## “To Mask or Not to Mask?”

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### Recommendations for Gathered Saints in Public Worship Michigan District, LCMS July, 2020

#### Prolegomena

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to harass our nation and world. It has disrupted business, entertainment, social and private lives, and the life and ministry of God’s Church. Pastors and congregations have learned some new ways of receiving God’s gifts of Word and Sacrament, from live-streaming worship and Bible study, to parking lot Communion, to additional in-person worship services to enable proper social distancing. We have even discussed the question of whether or not we should sing hymns.

Many or most of our congregations’ facilities across the Michigan District are open again for public worship. That is great news! We are able, once again, to gather in God’s House to receive the Word and Sacraments face to face. And perhaps there hangs the issue: We may need to define “face to face” differently for the foreseeable future.

We would refer everyone again to the article on the Michigan District website, [The Return of the Gathered Saints From Pandemic Exile](#). It was written to enable congregational leaders to engage with important questions in order to discover important answers in each unique context (area of the state, updated Executive Orders from the Governor or CDC, population density in the sanctuary, the changing impact of the pandemic, etc.).

#### **With that said, we offer the following guidance to the pastors and congregations of the Michigan District, LCMS, regarding the wearing of face masks in public worship:**

(This is not intended to direct our Lutheran Day Schools and Early Childhood Learning Centers, as such ministries have very unique concerns to engage as the weeks pass and lead toward the school year’s opening sessions.)

1. We are grateful to God that we have the freedom and privilege to gather in our sanctuaries for corporate worship as the most intense impact of the pandemic has, for the moment, passed in the state of Michigan.
2. We are grateful to God that Governor Whitmer has consistently communicated in her Executive Orders a respectful level of deference to “houses of worship” and the “exercise of religion” to be “exempt from prosecution” should an Executive Order significantly hinder such an “exercise of religion” for an individual or group.

3. We affirm that all our actions as Christians are intended to serve the God who has made and called us His own through Christ, and also to serve our neighbor in Jesus' name.
4. We affirm that wearing a face mask during a pandemic is not an infringement on our religious liberty, nor does it hinder the exercise of our Christian Faith.
5. We affirm that wearing a face mask is not intended to protect us from infection from our neighbor, but rather to protect our neighbor from inadvertently being infected by us.
6. We therefore recommend the following:
  - a. Face masks should be worn by all participants throughout our time of public worship in addition to appropriate social distancing, with the following exceptions:
    - i. Infants and small children.
    - ii. Those who have specific chronic respiratory distress.
    - iii. Those actively reading or preaching from the lectern or pulpit.
  - b. Face masks should be worn by choral ensemble or praise team members who are in close proximity to one another and not able to exercise social distancing while assisting in worship.
  - c. Face masks should be worn by the pastor and assisting ministers when near the elements for the Lord's Supper. (Example: The Prayers and The Words of Institution)
  - d. Face masks should be worn during the distribution of the Lord's Supper except when actually receiving the elements of the Sacrament.

**Post-legomena:**

The previous affirmations and guidance are offered in response to questions received by our Michigan District staff and leaders. Wearing a face mask is not an issue of doctrine or practice. **However**, we do believe it is an issue of public witness and Christian concern for our neighbor, whether he/she is seated in the adjoining pew in the sanctuary or a stranger at the grocery store.