Request for Religious Exemption to Mask Mandate for College Student

Dear University Administrator,

I am requesting an exemption to the policy requiring the continuous covering of my face (i.e. mouth and nose) on campus grounds due to my sincerely held religious convictions, which preclude me from being able to take part in this act. While it is not legally necessary for me to justify the basis for my sincerely held religious belief, nevertheless, I have provided below a few of the reasons why this policy violates fundamental aspects of my Christian faith – and why I cannot, therefore, in good conscience take part in it.

A mask requirement obscures God's image and contravenes His design for mankind.

Mankind is God's most prized creation, so much so that He created mankind "in His own image." (Genesis 1:27) Therefore, when we look around at one another, we are looking at reflections of the very image of God. That man was created in God's image is repeated all throughout the Bible, as it is a well-established precept of Christianity. (e.g. Genesis 9:6, James 3:9) No aspect of a person is more reflective of God's image than his or her face, since it is the most expressive, communicative, and uniquely identifiable part of each person. To force a person to continually cover his face when interacting with others, and especially when that person has no symptoms of illness, is to unjustifiably veil the clearest visible expression of God's image on us as human beings created in His likeness. I believe it is an assault on the image of God and contrary to His will for me.

Numerous passages in the Bible oppose the notion of covering one's face and head. For example, "A man ought not to cover his head, *since he is the image and glory of God.*" (1 Cor. 11:7) Another passage even describes Christians as being transformed more into the image of God, *with unveiled faces*: "[W]here the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another[.]" (2 Cor. 3:17-18a) Other passages encourage Christians to display outward affections toward fellow believers, such as "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (2 Cor. 13:12), which makes wearing a mask impracticable.

When God first made human beings, He called His creation "very good." (Gen. 1:31) In so doing, He did not place any covering over man's mouth and nose. Notably, we see that God did later intentionally cover mankind's reproductive areas as a result of man's sin (Gen. 3:21), but never their faces. God created the human body to live and flourish in the natural world He created for man, including the ability to breathe freely and with a remarkable immune system designed to fight off harmful foreign particles as we exercise healthy lifestyles. Masks, however, unnaturally inhibit both of these critical processes that God made for optimal human life and flourishing, and thus contravene God's design.

A mask requirement forces me to participate in communicating a lie.

God forbids lying throughout the Bible. Ephesians 4:25 says: "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." Christians are not to communicate messages they know to be false. It is abundantly clear to me by every scientific metric and numerous scholarly studies and medical professionals that face masks do not prevent the spread of virus-sized particles. Nearly every box containing cloth face masks *explicitly states* that the masks will not provide any protection against viruses, including COVID-19. Some studies have even shown that those wearing masks were *more likely* to become sick than those who did not wear masks, or than in places where masks were not mandated. Even NIH Director Anthony Fauci candidly expressed that "…wearing a mask might make people feel a little bit better and it might even block a droplet, but it's

not providing the perfect protection that people think that it is. And, often, there are unintended consequences…."

At best, the required continual use of face masks for COVID-19 is a public charade. At worst, the masks serve as a powerful tool for unhealthy social conditioning, unjustified widespread fear, and ultimately the universal surrendering of basic human freedoms. As a Christian who is aware of the facts about face masks, for me to be forced to continually wear one under the guise of stopping COVID-19, especially while I am healthy, is to force me to disobey God by participating in what I know to be a lie. I sincerely believe that this mask mandate does more harm than good physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually – not just to myself, but to others around me to whom I am communicating by my actions. Therefore, I cannot follow God's second greatest command – to love my neighbor as myself (Mark 12:31) – by continually wearing a face mask. Finally, James 4:17 says that "whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." In light of my convictions, for me to wear a mask when I am not sick would be sinful.

A mask requirement forces me to promote an ungodly message of fear.

The widespread continual wearing of masks reinforces not only a lie, but a glaring – and wholly unbiblical – message that we must continuously live in constant fear of an invisible particle and also of every other person, who is a de facto threat to our health and safety. This keeps people in a state of spiritual and mental slavery to a fear of the imminent death of themselves and others. But Jesus Christ came to free mankind from the fear of death, and He has done so for me. Hebrews 2:14-15 says: "Since the children have flesh and blood, [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives *were held in slavery by their fear of death*." Jesus said "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim *liberty to the captives* and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed[.]" (Luke 4:18) Continual mask wearing for fear of sickness and death is incompatible with my status in Christ.

God has already appointed the day each of us will die. (Psalm 139:16, Eccl. 3:2) Our anxieties over it cannot "add a single hour to [our] span of life." (Matt. 6:27) And 365 times in the Bible, more than any other single message, God commands His people to "fear not." 1 John 4:16 says that "God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him," and verse 18 tells us "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." Simply put, as a Christian, there is no place in my life for fear of sickness, pain, hardship, or death, and neither can I promote such a message of fear to others. I sincerely believe that continually covering my face with a mask "because of COVID" would necessarily cause me to communicate that fear, and I cannot do that while remaining faithful to God.

While I recognize that not everyone shares my same convictions in this regard, I hope at the very least that you can recognize that my religious beliefs are indeed sincere. Thank you in advance for honoring my sincerely held religious convictions.

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[Name]   [Date]   [Signature]