



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

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Diocese of New York and New Jersey

**Diocesan Guidelines for the Clergy
and the Parish and Mission Communities,
Concerning the Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

April 10, 2020

**These Guidelines are issued in accordance with and as an explication
of the Synodal Directives for the Clergy and the
Parish, Mission, and Monastic Communities of the Orthodox Church in America
Concerning the Coronavirus (COVID-19), issued Monday, March 30, 2020.
These Guidelines are in effect through April 30, 2020.**

1. A General Directive regarding the Divine Services and Parish Gatherings:

Keeping in mind that in the Orthodox Church in America in general, any Divine Services, and any ministries whatsoever, that are done in a parish, mission, or chapel are only done with the blessing of the Ruling Hierarchy:

- All parishes, missions, and chapels must seek a specific blessing from the bishop to perform any Divine Services whatsoever during this period. Each priest is to review with the Bishop the services he plans to celebrate, and not celebrate, during this time period. This includes not only ordinary services, such as the Divine Liturgy, but also particular Holy Week and Paschal Services, as well as extraordinary services such as Holy Unction, funerals, baptisms, and weddings.
- Clergy may not serve Liturgy in their home or in any other private home. If they desire to serve other Divine Services in their own home, they must consult with the bishop.
- As usual, the directives of the bishop given either via diocesan-wide letters or by individual communication of the bishop and his clergy and parishes are to be considered as binding.
- All other in-person gatherings and in-person activities of any kind continue to be forbidden.

2. Regarding Civil Directives:

- Any Divine Services performed in a local community must be in accord with all local, state, and federal civil directives regarding the prevention of the spread of COVID-19. All local civil curfews must be observed.

- All parish priests must educate themselves daily on any changes in the local, state, and federal civil directives in their parish's or mission's locality, and must ensure that the scheduling of and participation in their church's Divine Services comply with such civil directives.

- If anyone among the clergy or any members of a parish, mission, or chapel holds any sort of church service or gathering in direct opposition to their local civil authorities' COVID-19 preventative directives, such an action may result in severe canonical sanctions.

3. Limited Divine Services:

- Once the Priest and the assigned server/s and singer/s have entered the building for the service, the doors of the church must be locked.

- Anyone who within 15 days has made in-person contact with a household member, family member, or other acquaintance working in a medical facility with COVID-19 patients must absolutely not attend services. Even if such a person be a priest, a singer, or server in the parish, this still applies.

- Anyone who is a health care provider or a regular caregiver for a person among the at-risk population must not be among those at services.

- Any priest of age 65 or older who is compromised in health, or whose parish is compromised, is blessed not to serve the Divine Services if he so desires, without canonical penalty.

- During any of the Divine Services, all entrances into the church building, and church complex if applicable, must provide a warning statement regarding the fact that no one may enter the building without the express blessing of the parish priest, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Appropriate measures for disinfection and cleaning of the temple, the icons, the holy vessels, and all items normally used in the services or venerated by the faithful must continue, being done as prescribed by the public health agency of the federal government (e.g., the CDC).

- For the serving and celebration of the Divine Services, only as many parishioners are as needed to serve in the altar and sing the responses should be present.

- Live-streaming of the Divine Services should be provided if possible. For those parishioners without internet access, live phone access should be provided. If a parish is not serving Divine Services, or is unable to live-stream, parishioners should be directed to a different parish's or monastery's live-stream. A list of live-stream options may be found on the Diocesan Website, at <https://nynjoca.org/livestream>.

- A clergyman or layperson with infant children or a pregnant wife should take extra precaution and is recommended to consult his bishop regarding this if he has concerns.

4. Baptism:

Baptisms should be postponed except for cases of emergency. The bishop must be apprised of any baptism a clergyman desires to celebrate. All state and local civil directives affecting the scheduling and attendance of the Divine Services must be observed.

5. Holy Communion:

- On the days when the Ruling Hierarchy has blessed the Divine Liturgy to be served, a limited number of community members may receive the Holy Eucharist. At this time, the following directive holds:

- The faithful of the Diocese should understand that those persons who are unable to come to church to receive Holy Communion, because of their own health conditions or the guidelines necessitated by this pandemic, have the blessing to wait until they are able to fulfill their reception of the Body and Blood of Christ at such time as these restrictions are lifted.

6. Confession:

- The Sacrament of Confession may not be held in person during this period, except for those who are among the limited "crew" of servers and singers in a parish or mission that is holding Divine Services. If thus done in person, 6 feet of social distance must be maintained, as well as all other civil and public health measures applicable in the locality.

- The Sacrament of Confession may be held over the phone or by live video communication.

- If Confession is done over the phone or by live video, the priest should read the Prayer of Absolution before ending the phone call or video communication, in the hearing of the penitent.

- If one of the faithful is uncomfortable with Confession over the phone, then he or she is not bound to confess, but is blessed to wait until a time when in-person Confessions will be possible again.

- All are urged, however, to maintain a watchful examination of their conscience, to confess their sins in their daily prayers to the Lord, and to ask forgiveness of the other members of their households at the end of the day – so that spiritual complacency and hardness of heart do not set in during this time when sacramental Confession is not easily accessible.

7. Unction:

-As stated above, the Unction Service may only be held in a parish community with the express knowledge and blessing of the bishop.

- The Unction Service should only be held with the minimal crew of singer/s and server/s present.

- A new, burnable cotton swab or cotton wand (Q-Tip) must be used to anoint each individual. The used cotton swabs or wands must immediately be placed in a separate bag or container and set aside for burning.

8. Funerals:

Regulations for funerals are to be followed as directed by funeral home personnel. The bishop should be consulted with any particular questions.

9. Concerning Services for Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Pascha, and Bright Week:

These guidelines are deemed the most prudent response to extraordinary and temporary circumstances. These directives are intended only to avoid creating an environment at the churches where social-distancing and other infection-control standards may be compromised.

- Given the limitations on numbers of liturgical participants, and the length and complexity of the services, each parish should consult with the bishop as to what services they feel they are able to celebrate during Holy Week and Pascha.

- Processions normally held during these services are to be held inside the church building, not outside.

- Material offerings (e.g., palms, willows, blessed oil, red eggs) and Sacraments (e.g., Confession, Holy Unction, Holy Communion) may not be offered in a “drive-up” fashion by the clergy or anywhere on the church property to parishioners in or out of their vehicles, as this creates an opportunity, intended or not, for a gathering of persons incompatible with state and local mandates and recommendations.

- Palms and/or willows will be blessed during the Palm Sunday services as usual. However, they will not be distributed to the faithful by the clergy, either inside the church or anywhere on the church property, during the period of these limits on liturgical participation. Instead, palms and willows will be properly stored for distribution at a later time after these restrictions are lifted.

- Local civil curfews must be observed and liturgical services scheduled accordingly, in consultation with the Bishop.

- The traditional ringing of bells may take place, with the exception of Holy Pascha at midnight. At that time, in accordance with widespread curfews, it is recommended that bells not be rung.

- As stated above, all Divine Services performed in a local community must be in accord with all local, state/provincial, and federal civil directives and curfews regarding the prevention of the spread of Covid-19. Therefore, for this year, the Divine Liturgy of Holy Pascha is permitted to be served on Pascha Sunday morning, at the customary Sunday service time of the parish.

- Pascha Baskets will not be blessed during the services or on the church property. Instead, a prayer appropriate for the faithful to pray in their homes on Holy Pascha, asking the Lord to bless their Paschal foods, is enclosed at the conclusion of these Guidelines and will be made available on the Diocesan Website.

- Traditional blessing of graves is postponed until the guidelines are relaxed.

- Diocesan Guidelines for the Divine Services will be reviewed at the end of April.

PRAYER FOR THE BLESSING OF PASCHAL FOODS AT HOME
For Use in the Diocese of New York and New Jersey, Pascha 2020

READER: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, risen from the dead, have mercy on us and save us.

CHOIR: Amen. [Sing the Paschal Troparion]

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life! (Thrice.)

READER: O Lord Jesus Christ our God, Who art the Bread of Life and the Giver of all good things, as Thou didst receive and sanctify the ram which the faithful Abraham brought to Thee, and the lamb which Abel offered to Thee as a whole-offering; likewise, also, the fatted calf which Thou didst command to be slain for Thy prodigal son when he returned to Thee: that, as he was counted worthy to delight in Thy good things, so may we also delight in these foods that are sanctified and blessed by Thee for the nourishment of us all. Bless this Paschal bread, these fleshmeats, this cheese, these eggs, and all these other foods, and preserve us in Thy goodness, that, as we partake of them, we may be filled with Thy gifts, ungrudgingly bestowed, and with Thine ineffable goodness.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, risen from the dead, have mercy on us and save us.

CHOIR: Amen.

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life! (Thrice.)