



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

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**DIOCESAN GUIDELINES
CONCERNING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC**

**The Most Reverend MICHAEL
Archbishop of New York and the
Diocese of New York and New Jersey**

Given the need to be obedient to our Lord's mandate to be faithful shepherds of His flock and stewards of His Church; and in concert with the "Statement of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America on the Coronavirus Outbreak" (March 17, 2020); I am issuing the following Guidelines for the parishes of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey in response to this pandemic, effective this date, March 18, 2020:

- 1) All in-person parish and mission events and activities outside of liturgical services, including Coffee Hour, Church School, Parish Council and ministry meetings and the rest, are to be cancelled through Sunday, March 29.
- 2) In addition, all services other than the Sunday Divine Liturgy, the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts, and the Vespereal Liturgy for the Feast of the Annunciation are to be cancelled through March 29, at which time the diocesan hierarch will adjust this as the situation warrants. (The liturgical schedule for Holy Week and Pascha will be considered as the time becomes more proximate).
- 3) For scheduled services, the Priest (and Deacon), a Reader, a server, and a maximum of two (2) chanters or singers, are blessed to celebrate the services, provided all of them are in sound physical health and at low risk for COVID-19. All those "at risk" – the elderly, those with pre-existing medical conditions, or any who are actively sick or exhibiting any signs of illness – should absolutely absent themselves from the services. If "healthy" laypersons wish to attend these services, they may be allowed to participate. However, the total number of attendees for any service – including the clergy, the servers and the singers – shall not exceed the number of individuals prescribed by local authorities.
- 4) The above services may be celebrated by Priests who are not at risk and are healthy. If the services are scheduled, and there are no singers available to sing, or when a second person is not present to permit the celebration of the Liturgy, a Diocesan-approved Typika Service will be held for whomever is present.
- 5) If the parish priest himself is at risk health-wise, or if he feels strongly that the divine services listed above need to be cancelled through March 29, he is to first contact the District Dean and inform him. The archbishop will need to be informed if the parish will be effectively closed. The at-risk health of the clergy and faithful would be the rationale. The archbishop intends to speak personally with each parish rector and priest-in-charge within the week, to assess each parish's situation personally.

- 6) Baptisms, unless an emergency, should be postponed for the foreseeable future because of the limitation of total number of attendees for any service as prescribed by local authorities. Likewise, funeral services should be limited to family members only.
- 7) The previous points notwithstanding, parishes are free to accommodate the reception of Holy Communion by as many of the faithful as possible by “assigning” attendees to individual services. The creativity involved in accomplishing this is left in the hands of the parish leadership. Of course, the Priest may bring Communion to one’s home.
- 8) If possible, the Divine Services should be webcast on the internet so that the faithful may participate in the prayers, which are themselves a source of grace and consolation. If this is not possible, the parish priest should direct the faithful to the Internet site(s) of one of the parishes or monasteries that are already providing this service. Every effort should be made by Parish Leadership to provide the faithful with the service texts that are disseminated by the Diocesan Office, in order to follow live-streamed services or to pray themselves.
- 9) In situations where local governments have exercised a specific ban on public worship, a curfew, or other relevant limitations not addressed by these Diocesan Guidelines, the governmental directive should be adhered to by the parish(es) situated in these locations. If a priest or parishioners have questions or concerns about complying with both civil mandates and the Diocesan Directives listed here, then the priest is to contact his District Dean for guidance.
- 10) Clergy are reminded that they have the primary responsibility of visiting the sick, but should take as much care as possible not to expose themselves, the faithful or others to the virus.
- 11) Each member of the Parish Council should assist the priest and take a part of the parish directory and call parishioners, inquiring about their well-being and particular needs. Council members are to be given the mission to call their fellow parishioners frequently.
- 12) The Parish should attempt to use electronic communication programs such as Zoom or GoToMeetings to carry on parish council work, adult education and Church School instruction, instead of in-person meetings.

It is with a heavy heart that these actions have been taken in our Diocese and similar actions taken throughout the Church. However, the health and well-being of the faithful is our optimum concern. Again, all of us – but especially those at risk – need to heed the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch: “Look to the signs of the times ... but then look to the One who is beyond time.”

With my humble prayers, archpastoral blessing and sincere love,

+ Michael

+ M I C H A E L

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