



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

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**Diocese of New York and New Jersey
Diocesan Directives on the Gradual Re-Opening of Diocesan Churches
Issued May 8, 2020 ~ FOR DISTRIBUTION**

Beloved Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese:

We know there are many people who have been anxious to resume church attendance and the reception of the Holy Eucharist. These Directives are designed to begin the process of making that happen in each parish. **This is a plan for the future. It cannot go into effect until the stay-at-home rulings affecting the territory of the Diocese are lifted.**

While we would love to go back to things the way they were immediately, it will take careful planning to ensure that each parish's plan is successful. With this in mind, we issue the following specific directives at this time.

In consonance with the *Synodal Directives: Towards A Re-Opening of our Churches*, issued May 1, 2020, these Diocesan Directives are intended to address the particular circumstances of our diocesan parishes, missions, and chapels.

Parish priests are to familiarize themselves with the Synodal Directives of May 1, including the reprinted guidelines from the CDC and the Federal Government that are appended to that document. These Diocesan Guidelines presume the priest's familiarity with those documents. These Guidelines are intended to elaborate on certain key aspects of the Synodal Directives, with the expectation that the Synodal Directives will be implemented.

Below are the successive Phases and Stages outlined in the Synodal Directives.

<i>Federal Guidelines</i>		<i>Descriptions</i>
Phase 1	Stage 0	Services are completely suspended; no Divine Services are served
Phase 1	Stage 1	Sunday liturgy served by limited cohort
Phase 1	Stage 2	Additional weekly liturgies served by limited cohort
Phase 1	Stage 3	The Divine Office is offered by a limited cohort
Phase 2	Stage 4	Adding parishioners to liturgical cohort according to limits set by civil directives; Allowance for Baptisms, Reception of Converts, in person Confession, Marriages, with strict limits on attendance
Phase 2	Stage 5	Allowance for in person meetings: Parish Council, Coffee Fellowship according to limits set by civil decrees Allowance for Baptisms, Reception of Converts, in person Confession, Marriages, with slight loosening for limits on attendance
Phase 2	Stage 6	Careful increase of the number of parishioners to liturgical cohort according to limits set by civil directives Allowance for Baptisms, Reception of Converts, in person Confession, Marriages, with equivalent loosening for limits on attendance
Phase 3	Stage 7	Continued increase of activity that leads to full re-opening

- A parish cannot advance through multiple stages at once. At this time there are three general approaches from which a priest may choose to pursue the gradual re-opening of the church. The blessing of the diocesan bishop must be obtained for each parish to pursue any one of these options:

Option 1) One Liturgy per week, on Sunday (in addition to Major Feasts), with the minimum number of persons required to serve and sing; and scheduled 15-minute visitations following the Liturgy by single parish members or parish member households, to receive Holy Communion and, as desired, to pray, light a candle, and leave an offering (if Confession is desired, the timeframe could be extended)

Option 2) One to three Liturgies per week, with a maximum of 10 persons in the congregation, with a scheduled rotation of parishioners attending, so that all parishioners able to attend may have a regular opportunity to do so

Option 3) Two to three Liturgies per week, with the minimum number of persons required to serve and sing; and scheduled 15-minute visitations following each Liturgy by single parish members or parish member households, to receive Holy Communion and, as desired, to pray, light a candle, and leave an offering (if Confession is desired, the timeframe could be extended)

- Priests are to specifically arrange visitations by parishioners, either to scheduled appointments for Holy Communion (option 1 or 3 above) or to Liturgies (option 2 above), unless they assign a parish council member to make such arrangements.
- With option 1) or option 3) above, parishioners coming for Holy Communion by appointment after the Liturgy must prepare by praying Pre-Communion prayers, either participating in the live-streamed Liturgy or praying the Typika Service at home, and keeping a proper fast before the Eucharist.
- Parish council members are expected to ensure, and to recruit other parish volunteers to help ensure, the sanitizing of church facilities. This must occur between each service and, where applicable, every scheduled visitation for Holy Communion. The guidelines of the CDC should be observed; these are appended to the Synodal Directives.
- A parishioner is to be appointed to open and close the main church doors for persons entering and exiting the church.
- Doors leading from the narthex to the nave should be left open, weather and other conditions permitting.
- Hand sanitizer must be provided in appropriate areas of the church.
- Books are to be removed from the pews and other places in the church where they might be picked up.
- Bulletins and other print media may also not be placed in the church. Parishes should make every effort to distribute their regular bulletins, newsletters, etc., electronically. Parishioners who do not use the Internet should be included in updates on parish life.

- Social distancing (keeping at least 6 feet between individuals, or between household groups and other household groups or individuals) is to be kept in church. Priests and parish councils are to determine how many persons can occupy the church at one time keeping social distancing. It is suggested that temporary markings be placed in the church showing where persons or household groups may stand, both during services and during the reception of Holy Communion.
- After Holy Communion is offered, blessed bread (*antidoron*) may be distributed only if it has been prepared by a person(s) wearing a mask and sanitary gloves and observing social distancing from those partaking. Antidoron must be distributed such that each piece may be taken separately, either on a plate or in individual bags. Wine offered after Holy Communion (*zapifka*) may only be served in individual cups.
- The CDC recommends the wearing of masks or face coverings by congregants if social distancing can not be assured or achieved.
- No one should feel, or be, shamed by being absent from the church services whether because of physical health or because of anxiety. No one is to be coerced or compelled to come to the services before they are comfortable doing so.
- Pastoral care is to be offered diligently to those who cannot or choose not to attend the services, either because they belong to the vulnerable populations identified by the CDC, or they are caregivers or household members of persons infected with COVID-19, or they do not feel safe coming to services.
- Priests are encouraged and blessed to continue or re-invigorate outreach and ministry to their sick persons and shut-ins, provided they maintain proper requirements for protection of the parishioners and of themselves, including the wearing of face masks.
- With regard to Baptisms and Weddings: Until a parish has been blessed to function at the stage where Baptisms and Weddings are permitted (i.e., Stage 4 on page 1), Baptisms should be postponed except for cases of emergency. The bishop must be apprised of any baptism or marriage that a clergyman desires to celebrate. During those services, social distancing rules that are in effect in the locale of the parish must be maintained as recommended in these directives and by the CDC. Any alteration to the service to accommodate social distancing is to be proposed to the bishop for his blessing.
- Regulations for Funerals are to be followed as directed by funeral home personnel, as stated in the previously issued Diocesan Guidelines. The bishop should be consulted with any particular questions.
- Confession may continue to be held by video or phone; it may also be done in person with social distancing kept between the priest and the penitent, and with face masks worn by both. Absolution can be given by video or phone or in person.
- All in-person parish and mission events and activities outside of the prescribed liturgical services, including coffee hour, Church School, Parish Council and ministry meetings and the rest, remain cancelled until further notice. A parish must be blessed to function at the stage where such meetings are permitted before they can be resumed (see Stage 5, Page 1). The Parish should use electronic communication programs such as

GoToMeeting, Zoom, or telephone conferencing to carry on parish council work, parish adult education and Church School instruction.

- **If any clergy or layperson who has been present in the church becomes infected with the Coronavirus, the parish is to be closed and quarantined for 14 days, as well as all those persons who have been present in the services. The bishop must be informed immediately.**
- Each parish, led by the priest and assisted by the parish council, must answer the “Questions to Ask Before Re-Opening” found in Appendix A of this document, before the hierarch will bless its advancement to the next stage of re-opening. As part of responding to those questions, the priest is to use the on-line resource soon to be offered by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the U.S.A., to review the health and legal recommendations and rulings, specific to the particular locale of each parish, that affect the permissibility of gradual re-opening. Priests will be notified as soon as that resource from the Assembly of Bishops becomes available.

The gratitude of our Diocesan Family is expressed to all of our clergy who are working selflessly to keep our parish members connected to one another and to the Church. In addition, all those faithful laypersons are commended who are assisting in these efforts, through phone calls, charitable works, technological support, and the singing and live-streaming of the services.

Be assured of my daily prayers for each and every parish, mission, and chapel; each of our clergy and their family members, and all those who are sick and have asked for our prayers. May our Risen Savior continue to bless you with all of the good things which come from His hands.

With my humble prayers, archpastoral blessing and sincere love,



+ M I C H A E L

Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE RE-OPENING

Each parish, mission, and chapel must document responses to each of these questions before the blessing of the Diocesan Hierarchy will be given to advance to the next stage of re-opening.

As part of responding to these questions, the priest is to use the on-line resource soon to be offered by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the U.S.A., to review the health and legal recommendations and rulings, specific to the particular locale of each parish, that affect the permissibility of gradual re-opening. Priests will be notified as soon as that resource from the Assembly of Bishops becomes available.

1. Do the civil directives allow for re-opening?
2. Is the priest a member of the vulnerable population as defined by the civil authorities (e.g., is he over 65 years of age? Does he have pre-existing medical conditions)? Does he have a wife or household member who works in healthcare who is in contact with COVID-19 patients?
3. Has the church been thoroughly cleaned? Is a plan in place for the regular cleaning of the church after each service?
4. Does the church have a plan to accommodate faithful in the church building that meets the requirements for social distancing? Does the choir have such a plan?
5. Does the church have necessary equipment for re-opening (hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, personal protection equipment / PPE)?
6. Does the church have the necessary personnel trained to assist in the services (e.g., opening church doors, cleaning surfaces as necessary during a service, assisting at Holy Communion, etc.)?
7. Does the church have a plan to make sure that all members of the congregation who are able to come to services, have the opportunity to do so?
8. Is a plan in place for the distribution of Holy Communion?