



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 Parish Communities,  
for Liturgical Celebrations and Related Activities  
During Great Lent, Holy Week, and PASCHA of 2021**

**March 4, 2021**

To the Rectors, Acting Rectors, and Priests-in-Charge  
of the Diocesan Cathedrals, Churches, Missions, and Chapels:

With gratitude to God, we rejoice in the fact that at the present time, the rate of incidence of COVID-19 is decreasing within the territory of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey. Moreover, in recent months our church communities have been able to gather in greater numbers, and many persons are availing themselves of the COVID vaccines. In light of these facts, parishes are directed to offer – at the very least – Great Vespers, Confessions, and Divine Liturgy on weekends, and at least one Lenten weekday service, during each of the the six weeks of Great Lent.

As you plan your parish liturgical schedule for Great Lent, Holy Week, and the Pascha celebration, please do so according to these updated Diocesan Guidelines, issued with my blessing in consultation with the Diocesan Chancellors and Deans.

- **Forgiveness Vespers** should be served as usual, while observing all current safety protocols, but without the direct personal exchange of the kiss of peace. The priest will ask forgiveness of the congregation from the amvon. The faithful should respond from their places.
- **Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers** should be served in each parish separately, either directly after the Divine Liturgy or on Sunday evening, while observing all current safety protocols. The hosting of or participation in a multi-parish celebration requires the blessing of the hierarch.
- **The Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts** should be served as usual, while observing all current safety protocols. The hosting of or participation in a multi-parish celebration requires the blessing of the hierarch.
- **Fellowship Following Pre-Sanctified Liturgies** may be held in parishes where an Indoor Coffee Hour request, following current local civil safety protocols, has been submitted and approved. Parishes that have not yet submitted a written request for Indoor Coffee Hours but desire to offer fellowship following Pre-Sanctified Liturgies, Sunday Coffee Hours, or Pascha Agape Fellowship, must submit a request for approval for Indoor Coffee Hour to the Archbishop's Office, *at least one week* before they wish to begin these activities.
- **Deanery Sunday Lenten Mission Vespers** should not yet be scheduled this year. Sunday Lenten Vespers may be served in individual parishes, while observing all current safety protocols.
- **Processions**, such as those for The Sunday of Orthodoxy, Holy Friday, and Holy Saturday night may be done either outside or inside the church, at the parish priest's discretion. In compliance with current Diocesan guidelines, members of households may walk together; otherwise, social distancing must be kept during processions.

- **Palm Sunday:** Palms and pussy willows, pre-wrapped or pre-tied, may be distributed while observing all current safety protocols. For example, clergy, or those whom they delegate, wearing a mask and gloves, may distribute the branches by holding one end of the palms and/or pussy willows, and the recipient taking hold of them at the other end. Palms should be distributed at the end of the service, not prior to or at the beginning of the service, to avoid mutual contact during the service.
- **The Service of Holy Unction** may be served, while observing all current safety protocols. Anointing should be done with the priest wearing a mask and using a separate cotton swab for each person being anointed. Used cotton swabs are to be burned.
- **Pascha Red Eggs** may be distributed while observing all current safety protocols. Eggs should be pre-wrapped in plastic or wax-paper bags.
- **Delaying Pascha Liturgy to Sunday Morning** may be blessed, for reason of COVID considerations, for this year only. Parishes wishing to receive this permission must submit their request in writing, stating specifically the reason for the request, to the Archbishop's Office no later than Friday, April 16.
- **Communion Appointments on Pascha:** At the parish priest's discretion, appointments may be offered for parishioners to receive Holy Communion, late in the morning on the Sunday of Pascha, for those wishing to receive Holy Communion on Pascha who could not attend the Midnight Paschal Divine Liturgy. These parishioners would prepare for the Sacrament by participating in the services via live-stream or praying the Typika Service at home.
- **Pascha Baskets** may be blessed at times that are according to the present practice of the parish, while observing all current safety protocols. If Pascha Agape Fellowship is to be held (see below), baskets should be kept at each household's place in the fellowship hall, not placed on a common table. The priest will go around to each household's table and bless each basket. Masks are to be worn by the clergy and faithful.
- **Pascha Agape Fellowship** may be held in parishes where an Indoor Coffee Hour request, following current local civil safety protocols, has been submitted to the Archbishop's Office no later than Friday, April 16 and has been approved.
- **Bell Ringing** for services is permitted according to usual parish custom.
- **Safe Practices To Be Maintained.** Please understand that Diocesan and civil directives and guidelines requiring masks, social distancing, the sanitizing of churches and church facilities before all services and events, are still in effect. Parishioners who are in good health are asked to consider volunteering to share in the work of sanitizing the temple between services. Parishes should also take steps to ensure adequate circulation and ventilation of air in their facilities to minimize the spread of the virus. It is crucial that we remain vigilant throughout this rigorous liturgical season, to ensure to the greatest extent possible the health of our parishioners and all who enter our churches and church properties. Persons who have had recent exposure to COVID-19 patients, or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, should not come to church until they are determined not to be infected with the Coronavirus.

Thank you for your careful consideration of and cooperation with these Guidelines. I am grateful to God that our parishes are able to gather in greater numbers for this coming Lenten season than was possible last year. May He bless us to enjoy a spiritually enriching Fast and a glorious celebration of Great and Holy Pascha!

With my prayers, my blessings, and my love,

*f Michael*  
+ MICHAEL

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