



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

May 18, 2020

Dear Fathers,

As our country continues to “open up,” the time has come too for our parishes to offer our parishioners a responsible way forward. Please note that the contents of this email are directly specifically to the clergy of New York State, as the Connecticut clergy have already received directions regarding their state and the progress that has been made there. I beg that you remember that these are not permanent changes to our church practices, but temporary measures of safety and mutual respect.

Beginning Tuesday, May 19th, New York clergy will be able to open their parishes for individual prayer and also offer the sacrament of communion to the faithful in a very specific manner. Please read through these directions clearly and make sure that they are followed exactly as written, without interpretation.

Also, while it should go without saying, please note that this is a memo for clergy and should not under any circumstance be posted, shared or copied to email or social media.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Where the Faithful May Attend

- The Faithful may pray in and receive communion **only** at their local parish subject to the conditions below.

Who May Not Attend (Applicable to Clergy *and* Faithful)

- Those with any signs or symptoms of any acute illness (COVID or not) **MUST** stay home.
- Those who have come into contact with COVID-positive persons within the last 2 weeks.

Those who are at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19 (65 years or older, live in a long-term facility, underlying medical conditions, have family members with underlying conditions, such as asthma, heart conditions, immunocompromised, diabetes, obesity, kidney disease, or liver disease)

PREPARING THE CHURCH

- Each parish must place markings on seats and on the ground to ensure social distancing and establish a clear flow of traffic.
- Each parish must record the names and phone numbers of each attendee at every service in the event that an infection requires notice.
- In terms of preventing the spread of this virus, alert all parishioners to follow CDC

directives, which currently include: wash hands thoroughly and frequently, cover coughs and sneezes, avoid sharing personal items, wear a mask, and maintain a social distance of six feet.

- Churches must have hand sanitizer readily available at entrances, outside elevators, and other points of ingress. They should be sure that restrooms are properly stocked with soap, and sanitized frequently, recorded with an accompanying log sheet.
- Doors should be propped open so that door knobs or handles do not need to be used.
- Churches must be cleaned routinely between each use in accordance with CDC guidelines. Determine all areas that require cleaning and disinfecting in the Church, event areas, restrooms, hallways, offices, etc.; develop a checklist for site-specific protocols and procedures, particularly frequently touched surfaces and areas requiring more hygienic attention such as counters, door knobs, bannisters, electrical switches, etc.
- Signs should be posted on the front door of the church explaining the directives and stating the assumed risk of those entering by age and preconditions.
- Faithful must continue to honor the icons and other sacred objects by a reverent bow and making the sign of the Cross instead of kissing.
- No service books should be distributed or left out for common use.

INDIVIDUAL PRAYER

Although pursuant to Executive Order 202.10 “worship services” and “congregate services” are forbidden in houses of worship, our churches may open for individual prayer. Please note, that during this time of individual use by parishioners, there may not be any service of any kind. Your parish leadership should establish and promote hours that the Sanctuary will be open for individual prayer. These hours should be publicized to your parish, and all of the following guidelines must be observed:

1. At no time should there be more than 10 people in the church, including the priest. This means that there must be someone in the church to constantly monitor the number to ensure it does not exceed 10 people, including the counter.
2. Masks must be worn at all times during personal prayer. Those with valid medical exceptions, special needs and children 10 and under do not need to wear masks. If the faithful do not have a mask, the parish must provide them with one.
3. Hands must be sanitized upon entry.
4. Faithful must continue to honor the icons and other sacred objects by a reverent bow and making the sign of the Cross instead of kissing.
5. Faithful should refrain from shaking hands or kissing others.
6. At all times, the faithful must maintain social distancing from one another, with the exceptions of families that have been living together.
7. At the conclusion of their personal prayer time, faithful should exit the building and return directly to their vehicle without congregating or lingering.

HOLY COMMUNION

In addition, the faithful now are being invited to participate in the Sacrament of Holy Communion upon appointment. Please note the specific guidelines to be followed by each parish without variance or interpretation.

1. Communion can only be offered to the faithful following the conclusion of a Divine Liturgy. Please note that as per NY State Law, no one is allowed to be in the church during the actual Divine Liturgy. Communion will be distributed following the Apolysis and “Through the prayers..”
2. Each parish should set up a schedule of “Communion Hours” to immediately follow the Liturgy where individuals or families can come and receive communion by appointment ONLY.
3. Once the hours are distributed to the parish, the Priest or his designee should set up appointments for the faithful to participate in Holy Communion.
4. If a parish must add multiple weekday Liturgies to accommodate the faithful, that is allowed.
5. Appointments can only be made for individuals or families that have been living together for the duration of the lockdown.
6. At no time should there be more than 10 people in the church, including the priest.
7. When scheduling an appointment, the Priest or his designee must record the name, phone number and email for all people who will be entering the church.
8. Masks must be worn at all times by the faithful except for the singular moment when they receive Holy Communion. Those with valid medical exceptions, special needs and children 10 and under do not need to wear masks. If the faithful do not have a mask, the parish must provide them with one.
9. Hands must be sanitized upon entry.
10. The Faithful shall be directed on a path through the church, which allows them to enter from one aisle and depart the altar from another. This should be clearly laid out for all to see and follow.
11. Faithful should refrain from shaking hands or kissing others.
12. Once the faithful have entered the church, they should approach the Altar and receive Holy Communion. No service or prayers should be conducted at that time.
13. As a temporary measure only, Holy Communion will be offered via the following procedures designed to protect our clergy and our faithful:
 - a. The parish shall use multiple metal spoons that will be single use during the distribution of Holy Communion.
 - b. The parishioner will approach the chalice and be urged to tilt their head back and open their mouth wide so that the communion may be dropped into their mouth.
 - c. The Priest will use a new spoon to offer communion and then place the spoon in a separate receptacle before the next parishioner.
 - d. In lieu of a Communion Cloth, the parish will have disposable napkins available to the faithful, and upon approaching the chalice, the parishioner would take a napkin, hold it under their own chin, wipe or dab their mouth, and then dispose of the napkin in a container on the solea, the contents of which will be burned the same day.
 - e. Following each appointment, the spoons will be submerged in boiling water to cleanse them.

14. After having received Holy Communion, faithful should exit the building and return directly to their vehicle without congregating or lingering.

Respectfully,

Rev. Fr. Andreas Vithoulkas
Chancellor

