

**The HOLY SYNOD
of the
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN
AMERICA**

**Synodal Directives for the Clergy and the Parish, Mission, and
Monastic Communities of the Orthodox Church in America
Concerning the Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

March 30, 2020

**In accordance with the Synodal Statement of this same date
and in effect for the period of: March 30, 2020 – 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, all Divine Services and all ministries that are done in a monastery, parish, mission, or mission station are only done with the blessing of the Ruling Hierarch (the Diocesan Bishop or the Locum Tenens):

- All monasteries, parishes, missions, and mission stations must seek a specific blessing from their bishop to perform any Divine Service whatsoever during this 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 private home. If they desire to serve other Divine Services in their own home, they must consult with their bishop.
- As usual, the directives of a bishop given either via diocesan-wide letters or by individual communication of the bishop to 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:

In accord with the Apostle Paul's injunction to bishops to remind their flocks "to be submissive to rulers and authorities" (Titus 3:1):

- The authority to interpret the civil authority's directives resides with the bishop.
- All Divine Services performed in a local community must be in accord with all local, state/provincial, and federal civil directives regarding the prevention of the spread of Covid-19.
- All parish priests must daily make efforts to ensure that they are aware of any changes in the local, state/provincial, and federal civil directives in their community's locality, and must ensure that the Divine Services of their parish or mission community are in compliance with all such civil directives.
- If anyone among the clergy or if any member of a parish, mission, or mission station holds any sort of church service or gathering in direct opposition to the local civil authorities' Covid-19 preventative directives, such an action may result in severe canonical sanctions.

3. Limited Divine Services:

If the Ruling Hierarch has blessed for limited or "closed" Divine Services to be served in a community, services must be served according to whatever directives he has given to the priest and his parish or mission community either by diocesan-wide letter or individually. Nevertheless, all communities serving such limited services must adhere to the following at this time:

- 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 among the at-risk population, including those over 65, those with serious medical conditions, and those with any symptoms of illness of any kind, should not be among those attending any of these limited Divine Services. *An exception may be made in the cases of a priest and of a priest's wife, due to age only. See below.*
- 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. *An exception may be made in the case of a priest's wife, due to age only. See below.*
- Any priest of age 65 or older has the blessing of the Synod to excuse himself from serving the Divine Services without canonical penalty. Any priest of age 65 or older but in good health and suffering no symptoms of any illness may be able to serve the Divine Services if he consults with his bishop. Any priest's wife of age 65 or older, but in good health and suffering no symptoms of any illness, may be able to attend the Divine Services, in consultation with the bishop.
- During all Divine Services, all entrances into the church building, and church complex if applicable, must display 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 medically-approved prevention measures as prescribed by the public health agency of the federal government (e.g., the CDC in the United States) must be followed as much as possible.
- For the serving and celebration of the Divine Services, only as many parishioners as needed in order to serve in the altar and sing the responses should be present. Efforts should be made for this limited “crew” of singer(s) and server(s) to be the same at every service.
- If it is possible, live-streaming of the Divine Services should be provided. Live phone access should be provided for those parishioners who do not have internet access,. If a parish is not serving Divine Services, or is unable to live-stream, parishioners should be directed to the live-streaming services of another parish or monastery.
- A priest should take extra care if in his family his wife is pregnant or there are infants and/or young children. If he has such concerns, it is recommended that he consult his bishop.

4. Holy Communion:

On the days when the Ruling Hierarchy has blessed the Divine Liturgy to be served by a limited number of community members, the following directives hold:

- In the case that anyone is unable to receive Holy Communion at this time due to any reason related to parish closure, distance, health risks, or civil travel bans and “stay at home” directives, the Holy Synod blesses that such a person may wait until such a time as they are able to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, with all proper preparation and faith in the Eucharist.

5. Confession:

Taking into consideration the spiritual and mental healing that comes through the Sacrament of Confession, the Holy Synod blesses, for all priests and communities in the Orthodox Church in America, that for this period:

- 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, six (6) feet of social distance must be maintained, as well as must be all other civil and public health measures applicable in the locality.
- The Sacrament of Confession may be held over the telephone or by live video communication.
- If Confession is heard over the telephone or by live video, the priest must read the Prayer of Absolution before ending the phone call or video communication, in the hearing of the penitent.
- If anyone of the faithful is uncomfortable with Confession over the phone, then he or she is not bound to confess, but may wait until a time when in-person Confessions will be possible again.

6. Unction:

If the Ruling Hierarchy has given his blessing for the Sacrament of Holy Unction to be held in a community, the following directives hold:

- 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.