



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS ^{OF} ATLANTA

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΤΛΑΝΤΑΣ

May 13, 2020

My Beloved co-celebrants in the Lord, esteemed Parish council Presidents and members, Philotochos Presidents and members, Reverend Monastics and faithful,

Χριστός Ανεστή! Christ is Risen!

I greet you my beloved with love and joy in the name of our Resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I pray that this message finds you well, as we arrive to the mid-point of Pentecost!

Our society today is dealing with the pandemic of COVID-19, which is an infectious and deadly virus. We must consistently think about other people: relatives, co-workers, strangers--as well as ourselves, in order to create a safe society. In our great country, it is impossible for us all to be the same, for even the land, that we live in has mountains, valleys, small and large cities. Each place has different requirements and different rules to live by, for all to be safe.

We all feel great pain that we are not able to attend church services and receive the sacraments and for this reason, we believe that the time has arrived to begin thinking about re-opening our churches. Therefore, in order to re-open our churches we must **STRICTLY** follow the National, State and local regulations, orders and directives. Our God-protected Metropolis spans eight states, which contain small and large communities, not to mention our monasteries. As such, we cannot give one set of directions for all to follow.

Therefore, next week we will host conference calls set up via Zoom for parishes in each of our States to talk to each Priest and two members of their parish council. Following the conference call, I ask for each Priest and the two parish council members to discuss the details of implementation with their Parish Council, taking into account all regulations pertaining specifically to them and to decide accordingly. These meetings will give our parishes the opportunity to inform us of their understanding of their State's regulations their responsibilities to their faithful, or to clarify any questions parishes may have. [\(For detailed information on next week's State meetings, please read the instructions by clicking **HERE**.\)](#)

Once your parish has ensured compliance with all regulations, beginning Sunday, May 31, 2020 you may decide to re-open your church for in person worship.

To assist your planning efforts please consider and answer the following questions. If your answer is "No" to any of these questions, it is an indication that you are not ready to re-open and it is imperative that these matters are addressed before re-opening.

1. Do the applicable National, State and local regulations, orders and directives allow for in person services?
2. Has the church building been thoroughly cleaned? Is a plan in place for the regular cleaning and sanitizing of the church after each service? (See attached CDC guidelines)

3. Does the church have a plan to accommodate faithful in the church building that meets the requirements for social distancing?
4. Does the church have necessary equipment for re-opening (hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment and supplies)?
5. Does the church have the necessary personnel trained to assist in the services (parish council, or a greeter, for example)?
6. Given the attendance restrictions, does the church have a plan to make sure all members of the congregation who are able to attend services and wish to attend, are able to attend, such as offering multiple services throughout the week or rotating services?
7. Is the priest a member of the vulnerable population as defined by the civil authorities? If so, he should examine himself and ask the following questions, "Do I have serious pre-existing medical conditions?" Secondly, he should ask, "Do I have a household member who works in healthcare who is in contact with COVID-19 patients?" These are things to take into consideration.

Once these are answered, the following must also be addressed.

1. Create attendance groups
 - Designate each household into a group and assign days or times of attendance.
 - Schedule additional liturgies.
 - Each parish must record the names and phone numbers of each attendee at every service in the event that a subsequent infection requires tracing.
 - Each parish must alert its parishioners to become familiar with the symptoms of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell), and direct parishioners that if any of these symptoms present themselves, they must **NOT** attend church, and immediately seek medical attention for themselves and their household.
 - Parishioners who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 as defined by civil authorities shall be given dispensation not to attend services and shall be asked to refrain from attending.
 - In terms of preventing the spread of this virus, alert all parishioners to follow CDC directives, which currently include: washing of hands thoroughly and frequently, covering your coughs and sneezes, avoiding sharing personal items, wearing a mask, and maintaining a social distance of six feet.
 - In order to serve those of high risk and those with medical conditions, please contact your clergy to make special arrangements for them.
2. Follow social distancing guidelines
 - All parishioners, except chanters while singing, must wear masks at all times
 - Parishioners must limit their movement in the church.
 - All attendees must wash or sanitize hands upon entering and exiting the church.
 - Churches must be cleaned and sanitized meticulously between each service in accordance with CDC guidelines, especially objects that are routinely touched, like door handles, or furniture.

- 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 doorknobs or handles do not need to be used, or else a person with gloves must be designated to mind the door.
- Signs should be posted on the front door of the church explaining the directives and stating the assumed risk of those who are part of the vulnerable population.

3. Preparing the Church

- The entire church must be cleaned/sanitized prior to each service in accordance with **CDC guidelines available to view [HERE](#)**.
- X's or some other form of marking must be taped to the floor/pews with six feet spacing between in all directions to ensure proper social distancing.

4. During the services

- Before entering the church, the temperature of each person will be taken by a designated person. If the person's temperature is above 100.4°F he or she will be kindly asked to return to their home, both for their safety and the safety of others.
- Parish Council will direct each parishioner to the designated X in the pews for each person or household to sit starting in the front of the church and working their way to back.
- A place to accept offerings will be provided in the Narthex upon entering or leaving. If your community has set up online giving, people should be directed to visit the website to make an online offering.
- Parishioners are not to move around the church during the services to light candles or venerate icons.
- Candles can be lit on behalf of the parishioner by a designated person if possible.
- Honor is to be shown to Holy Icons and the Holy Cross by only doing your cross and bowing, keeping in mind not to kiss or to touch the Holy Icons and the Holy Cross.
- No one is to enter the Holy Altar except the clergy and assigned adult helpers.
- As for the Memorials, please write the names of your deceased for the clergy to pray for their souls (without Koliva).
- For the Saturday of Souls specifically (June 6, 2020), email, mail or give only the names to the clergy with one tray of Koliva being prepared by the community which will be offered on behalf of those who have departed.
- As for Artoclasias, they will be celebrated as normal.
- No service books should be distributed or left out for common use. This includes papers of any kind (bulletins etc.). Parishioners are encouraged to bring their own service books.
- All official communications will be available via electronic means from the parish.

5. During Holy Communion

- Communicants must line up row by row (with help from Parish Council) and remain six feet apart using the designated social distancing X's that have been placed in the church.

- Communicants may remove their masks only momentarily to receive Holy Communion.
- Clergy and assisting adult helpers must wear a mask during the distribution of Holy Communion.
- The red communion cloths (μάκτρα) will be held underneath the person's chin by the assigned adult helpers. The communicant may not touch it and absolutely no wiping of mouths.
- No antidoron will be distributed at the time of Communion but instead at the end of the service.
- Please read the guidelines for the reception of Holy Communion, [HERE](#).

6. After services

- After the dismissal, the clergy will distribute the antidoron wearing a mask and gloves and they will not offer their hands for reverence.
- Clergy and faithful will refrain from handshakes or hugs.
- For the continued safety of those attending church services in person, parishioners should immediately leave when the service is finished. For the sake of others, please do not socialize in the Narthex or other areas of the church or its surrounding buildings or parking lots. Additionally, Sunday Coffee Fellowship hours should continue to be suspended until further notice.

In addition to the above-mentioned guidelines clergy are also asked to review this guide, which describes health and safety guidelines for each of the sacraments.

All non-liturgical in person activities in the community are to **REMAIN** suspended until further notice. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Youth Ministries like Day Schools, Greek Schools, Catechetical Schools, HOPE/JOY, GOYA, OCF, Young Adult, and Hellenic Dance
- Adult Education Classes or Bible Studies
- Philoptochos
- All ministries intended for seniors
- Luncheons, speakers, Hellenic Fraternal Organizations and social gatherings (i.e. Book Clubs)
- Athletic Activities
- Service Projects
- (Should your parish have the means to conduct Bible Studies over video, you may use this technology until in-person events can be resumed)

Youth ministries should take place virtually as much as possible. On the Metropolis level, we have cancelled retreats and summer camp but are currently creating a variety of virtual opportunities that will allow the youth to come together with their fellow campers, counselors and clergy during summer 2020. We are also exploring the possibility to do something specifically for the high school seniors.

Please note that no Vacation Bible Schools or other summer camps should take place this summer in the community, but I encourage you to look at virtual options.

Parish Council and ministry meetings should continue to meet as normally scheduled and should only be conducted through conference calls or video conferencing.

Offices should continue to remain open for their normal hours. Parishioners are encouraged to contact the office by email or phone and if necessary by appointment only, keeping social distancing requirements while wearing masks for all in person meetings.

After the Parish Council studies the above guidelines and takes the appropriate actions in conjunction with the National, State and local regulations, orders and directives, the Parish Council should ensure timely and adequate communications with the faithful.

Having in mind that the target date of re-opening our churches is Sunday, May 31, 2020, there should be sufficient time to clean and disinfect the church, prepare social distancing markers, organize ourselves, so that we will be ready. Please note, this is not a mandatory date to re-open but the earliest date that the parishes in our Metropolis may open if conditions are met.

Finally, I would like to ask all of you, clergy and laity, to pray to our Almighty God not to reject or abandon us, but rather come to redeem us. May He draw us near to His customary kindness and bring calm to ourselves and all humanity by His great power raising us up to glorify and thank Him.

With this, I remain faithfully and greet you once again with Χριστός Ανεστή! Christ is Risen!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexios', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta