



Bulgarian Diocese of Toledo *Orthodox Church in America*

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Prot. No. 03312020

March 31, 2020
Repose of Saint Innocent of Alaska

Dear Beloved Fathers and Brothers,

The blessing of the Lord!

Our Divine Services, chief among them the Holy Liturgy, are an offering made to God "on behalf of all and for all." During this global health crisis we must continue to pray and, as long as possible, to gather for prayer in church and to offer to God his "due worship and praise" (*Prayer of the Trisagion*), as is "proper and right" (*Eucharistic Prayer of St. John Chrysostom*). As a result, I am not yet prepared to cancel church services in our parishes and missions.

We, of course, face an uncertain time ahead of us. Thus, I continue to be concerned for the health and welfare of the clergy and faithful of my two dioceses (and of all of our neighbors). Still I remain convinced of the importance of celebrating the Divine Services.

Trying to balance these two goods, I put forth the following two directives for the parishes and missions in my two dioceses to which I expect all my clergy to adhere:

A. If a parish or mission is in a civil jurisdiction that is **NOT** under "shelter at home" or mandatory isolation, the previous direction remains in place. Previously scheduled Lenten services may proceed as planned. Only, I direct that the number of participants is limited to absolutely no more than 10 or the limit set by the civil authority (whichever is the lesser), and that group must be the same for every service to avoid cross-contamination of servitors (e.g. rotating rosters of servitors may **not** be employed). All precautions should be followed as previously directed.

OR, in the absence of an explicit directive from local authorities, the more cautious approach (**B**) below may be utilized from this point forward.

Regarding Holy Week: I further direct that the services of Holy Week shall be precisely the same as for those parishes under "shelter in place" (approach **B**, below).

B. If a parish or mission is in a civil jurisdiction that is under "shelter at home" or mandatory isolation, then

1. Parishes and Missions, **where it is feasible and appropriate, may serve**

- One Presanctified and the Sunday Resurrectional Divine Liturgy
- The Liturgy of Palm Sunday
- The following recommended for Holy Week: One Bridegroom Service, Vespertal Liturgy of Holy Thursday, Vespers of Holy Friday, and Vespertal Liturgy of Holy Saturday.
- The Vespertal Liturgy for Holy Saturday may be served in the late afternoon.
- The Liturgy for Pascha on Sunday morning (scheduled at your normal Sunday service time).



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2. All Parishes and Missions

- Shall have no more than 5 people total, that **must be the same** for every service, in attendance inclusive of clergy. Rotating schedules are **not** to be employed.
- Parishioners shall be instructed to remain at home. The doors of the church are to be locked.
- A thorough disinfection shall be conducted after each service.
- The Church building shall not be opened for any purposes outside of your scheduled liturgical services.
- No one-on-one pastoral interaction, except *in extremis*. Therefore, no confessions and no distribution of communion.
- Confessions, baptisms and chrismations shall be postponed until further notice.
- Pastors shall creatively and consistently care for their parishioners while separated from them physically.

3. But, it is perfectly acceptable in cases where communities and governmental officials have implored citizens to remain at home to stop the spread of the disease (excepting for necessities and exercise), it is permitted and acceptable to close the church for all services. This action is acceptable as a compassionate step to fully participate in community efforts to curb the impact of this disease among our neighbors. Situations where a priest has high risk family members, or is high risk himself, might opt for this approach. This is a compassionate step that our communities may take in situations where the pastor deems it appropriate.

The services will be celebrated simply, "on behalf of all and for all". This is a season of life where we are being called to sacrifice our pastoral longings and customary service for the good of the very cities and towns for which we pray during each divine service. This is a truly noble endeavor befitting the Gospel of Christ, even if we are unsettled by it all.

Commemoration lists from all parishes and missions that have temporarily closed will be provided so that, in the Diocese of South, Archimandrite Gerasim and St. Seraphim Cathedral will commemorate all the clergy of the diocese and all those faithful whom the diocesan clergy have provided at the prothesis at all liturgies (as will the monastics at the Monastery of the Holy Archangel Michael in Cañones, New Mexico); and in the Bulgarian Diocese, commemoration lists will be provided to Holy Cross Monastery through its Diocesan Chancellor, Archpriest Andrew Jarmus.

These provisions will remain in place at least through April 30, 2020, unless otherwise updated. When the "all clear" has finally been signaled by all the civil jurisdictions, I will designate a common Sunday that all the parishes and missions of my dioceses will be directed to celebrate the Paschal Matins and Liturgy in full (*viz.* 2 Chronicles 30:1-4).

Continue to be patient. Neither this pandemic nor any civil decree can keep you from keeping the Gospel commandments.

in Christ Jesus, with the love of our Lord, and with the fast,

Archbishop of Toledo and the Bulgarian Diocese –
Orthodox Church in America

cc: Metropolitan Tikhon, Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada