



UPDATED DIRECTIVES REGARDING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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To our Beloved Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the God-protected Diocese of Eastern America of the Serbian Orthodox Church

As the United States of America faces this globally unprecedented and rapidly changing COVID-19 pandemic, relative to our previously issued guidelines, we remain fully committed to providing Archpastoral guidance throughout this crisis and fulfilling our common duty to ensure the safety of all our clergy, monastics and faithful, and through them the communities in which we abide, while fully respecting the precepts of our Orthodox Christian Faith.

The Holy Synod of Bishops of our Serbian Orthodox Church has, among all else, noted in its recent Communiqué, that it "...calls upon all the faithful of our Church for responsibility and sobriety in this situation and urges them not to neglect the instructions of the medical services and state authorities and not to neglect or ignore the prescribed preventative measures – in one word, not to endanger themselves or others. There is no space, however, for panic and rumors."

As such, federal, state and local government guidelines and restrictions do not allow us to congregate – either at all, or no more than groups of 10. In order for us to do our share in combatting this pandemic, we have compiled the following updated guidelines for all parishes and monasteries of the Eastern American Diocese, effective immediately and until further notice:

- We reiterate our previous call for parishes to cancel all non-liturgical activities and social functions;
- The celebration of the Divine Liturgy remains an imperative for our Orthodox Christian faith and for our salvation. For in Christ, as we have noted, "we are already healed, and continually being healed through receiving Holy Communion, the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ". However, given these trying circumstances under which we now live, painful as it may be, beginning this Sunday, March 22, and until further notice, the Divine Liturgy will be celebrated simply by the priest, assisted by an altar server, and a chanter and, only where permitted, no more than 10 persons total at any liturgical service;
- As it is Great and Holy Lent, the priest may prepare a second *Lamb*, as we would do for the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts, which then can be distributed on weekdays in order to give the faithful access to the Life-Creating Mysteries of Christ, and not deprive them of the Holy Sacrament of Sacraments during these troubling times. This must, however, be done in accordance to the manner prescribed by our liturgical books;
- All other liturgical services may be served in the same manner, again, as permitted by local regulations;

- Funerals will be done in accordance with the guidelines established by civil authorities and industry directors;
- Parishes, which incorporate technology to livestream the Divine Services, are encouraged to do so, after consulting with the Bishop or Dean regarding their proper use and distribution;
- All parish and monastery churches should remain open on a scheduled basis, or by appointment, for our faithful to offer individual prayers and light candles;
- All measures to ensure the thorough cleaning and sanitizing of all church facilities must continue according the standards and guidelines of the CDC and local Health Department; and
- Though we are not permitted to congregate as such, we must nonetheless embrace this time as an opportunity to do all that we can to increase our care for one another, and the greater community in which we live, and bear responsibility.

His Holiness, our Serbian Patriarch Irinej, has given us a perfect example of how we are to surrender ourselves in humble obedience, by realizing the seriousness of the situation, with regard to the presence of the pandemic. As he has accepted the advice of doctors, i.e., infectologists and epidemiologists, he calls upon us to strictly adhere to the prescribed measures of protection from coronavirus. Relative to the same, he decided by his personal example, as an elderly citizen, to demonstrate how one should sacrifice and adhere to necessary restrictive measures prescribed by experts and State institutions.

Therefore, the Church presently calls upon us, as the source of blessings, to nurture us in the commandments of Christ and lead us to His Kingdom. As the Church tells us when to fast, and when not to fast, we listen and do our best to obey these instructions. In like manner, when the Church now gives us instructions, as set forth above, we listen and must do our best to obey Her directives.

Let us accept these restrictions as another, necessary, Lenten effort, another *podvig* for these trying times, supplementing and complimenting the traditional Lenten virtues of prayer, fasting and caring for one another through almsgiving and acts of love and mercy towards those around us

We are all truly responsible for one other, as the Venerable Silouan of Athos said, “*My brother is my life.*” May our Lord grant that we continue this Lenten journey, honoring His Life-giving and Saving Passion with faith and courage, as we make necessary sacrifices for the physical and spiritual well-being of all, in light of His Glorious Resurrection.

These updated directives supersede those previously posted and distributed.

With Archpastoral blessings and Paternal love,

Bishop of Eastern America

