



## **A Nationwide Approach of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA For the Staged Reopening of Churches during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

“Feed My Lambs”

To the Orthodox Christian Faithful of the United States of America:

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

In this time of global pandemic, the majority of the Faithful of our Churches have been withheld from receiving Holy Communion and attending Divine Services in order to safeguard their health and the health of others. We, [the Hierarchs of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA](#), are taking action to restore the possibility of Holy Eucharist to the “lambs” of Christ, in accordance with His word.<sup>1</sup>

We are aware that the course of the disease is not certain by any means. The [structures that were put into place for Holy Week and the Holy Pascha](#), and which remain the common practice to this moment, may be necessary again in the future, depending on the best public health assessments and legal requirements.

Nevertheless, we have heard the pained cry of the Faithful who, although faithful in their devotion, as witnessed by virtual participation in broadcast services and their continuing stewardship support of the Church, have felt an intense separation from Holy Eucharist and their Communities. Therefore, in order to meet the spiritual nourishment of our Orthodox Christians in this time of the careful and considered re-opening of societal functions – with all the diverse legal restrictions among varying civil jurisdictions and with recommendations from public health experts – [we have developed a common toolkit](#) to facilitate the nourishing of the Faithful through the Most Pure Body and Most Precious Blood of our Risen God and Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, and return to liturgical services.

The system takes into account the plentitude of differing realities in the various regions, jurisdictions, and demographics throughout the country. It considers the wide-ranging parish sizes, local policies, and climate conditions. It provides each bishop assistance in determining a way forward that, when applied properly and tailored for specific parishes, leads to the best practice for a given scenario. Thus, there will be instances where one parish might be able to open while conditions remain unsafe for another. For this reason, it is of utmost importance for faithful to attend only their “home” parish during this period of restoration and follow the directives of *their* presiding bishop. Attending a neighboring parish can elevate risk, shift the aforementioned considerations, and contribute to regression.

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<sup>1</sup> John 21:15-25 (the Eleventh *Eothinon* Gospel).

Finally, we acknowledge that this is a first step in a long journey, in which we rely on the Mercy of God. With faith in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that better days will soon be seen, and the resumption of the normative practices of the worshipping Church may return to their full exercise.

It was the Lord Himself Who commanded the Apostles to feed the Five Thousand when He said: “You give them something to eat.”<sup>2</sup> And it was the Disciples who distributed the blessed five loaves and two fishes to the assembled, after they were arranged in groupings by the Lord.<sup>3</sup> We are following His example, asking that you also arrange yourselves to partake of the Holy Eucharist parish by parish, so that you also “may eat and all be filled” as were the Five Thousand.<sup>4</sup>

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

**[The Hierarchs of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA](#)**

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 6:37.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 6:39-41.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 6:42.