



THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

## THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX EPISCOPATE OF AMERICA

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The Most Reverend Dr. NATHANIEL Popp, Archbishop

### **Directive for Pentecost The Stages for Opening the Parish Church June 7, 2020**

The Holy Synod, on May 1, 2020 ([Synodal Directive: Towards a Re-opening of our Churches](#)), refined the phases enumerated in the [U.S. Federal Guidelines](#) (also see [Health Canada](#)). The process of re-opening Episcopate parish churches will be in accord with phases set forth by the federal (USA) government and Health Canada. The model is fundamentally taken from the US Federal Guidelines “Opening America Again.” We have, according to our Episcopal responsibility, determined what we considered appropriate action according to the composition and needs of our unique diocese comprised of parishes in seven (7) Canadian provinces and twenty-seven (27) USA states.

**In anticipation of the Feast of Pentecost/ Rusalii, we are issuing this Directive for Pentecost so that, in as much as is civilly allowable, some faithful may participate in the Eucharist on this great Feast of the Church, the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church.**

Provinces and states vary in their restrictions concerning gatherings in churches. These may also be further determined by municipality and county authorities. **We assign to the parish priest the responsibility to keep abreast of all government changes affecting the matters of church services and to implement them.**

#### **Parish Liturgical Service Capacity**

Attendance is strictly according to governmental directive. At this time, we do not give a blessing for any parish to be open to 100 percent capacity, even with government approval.

#### **BRIEF RESUME**

##### **Phases of Parish Church Opening**

According to Federal Guidelines, there were three (3) phases with seven (7) stages. We followed thus:

Phase 1, stage 0: All parish and monastery churches were closed. No Divine services were to be served as outlined in our Directive of March 17, 2020.

Phase 1, stage 1: We blessed resident clergy to serve in the parish church and non-resident clergy to serve at home those non-Eucharistic services according to our Directive of April 2, 2020.

Phase 1, stage 2: We presented a complete outline for Great Lent and Holy Week, as well as Bright Week to the clergy, without the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

Phase 1, stage 3: We gave a blessing for the Divine Liturgy to be celebrated in the parish church and particular homes, May 17-31, with limited participants: priest and family and cantor in our Directive of May 15, 2020.

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Phase 2, stage 4: As states and provinces have begun to allow religious services to be held with a limited number of participants present, **we now bless the celebration of the Divine Liturgy**, thus inviting the faithful to attend to receive the Holy Eucharist in numbers according to strict observance of local civil authorized guidelines and according to our guidelines.

With the possibility of more provincial and state relaxations of restrictions on church attendance, we propose that the cycle of services of Saturday vespers, Sunday matins and the Divine Liturgy, be celebrated according to the established tipica for Sundays.

Our primary concern has been, and remains, for the well-being of our clergy, their families, the entire parish population, for neighbors and friends in our communities. The spiritual health of each, as always, is a personal elective, but we urged families to strengthen the home-church, the “micro-church.” This was possible, given that families were restricted to their homes “twenty-four-seven.” Parish priests experimented with “live-streaming” and other methods of social media, finding it a positive experience. Parishioners set aside time to listen to their priest’s broadcasts and found that, although in a form novel to them, they were spiritually nourished. Clergy had the opportunity to “self-criticize” after watching their own live broadcast.

### **ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENTS**

Every priest must read and be familiar with the entire [Synodal Directives of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America of May 1, 2020](#). The following are fundamental instructions based on those Directives.

The Parish Priest must read and be familiar with those Guidelines, especially:

- Appendix C: Questions to Ask Before Reopening (Page 7)
- Appendix B: Conditions and Actions to be Considered Before Opening Church (Page 6)
- Appendix A: Preventative Measures (Page 5)
- Appendix D: Center for Disease Control Guidelines U.S.A.
- Appendix E: U.S. Federal Guidelines or Health Canada Guidance.

Paragraphs:

- 6. Conditions for Re-opening (Page 3)
- 7. Pastoral Concern for Vulnerable Populations (Page 3)
- 9. Civil Directives (Page 4)

## **Romanian Orthodox Episcopate Resume of Guidelines for Opening Churches**

### **Initial Considerations:**

A designated Liturgy, only if merited, may be provided on a weekday specifically for individuals who are 65 and above or who have an underlying at-risk health condition which would cause them concern to be present among a larger number of persons.

Virtual Sunday Liturgy and weekday services should, if possible, be continued in behalf of those who, because of various reasons, are not able or willing to attend in person.

Individuals with health conditions or who are not prepared to be in community should remain at home.

### **Spiritual Preparations for Attendance: Mystery of Confession**

We must be at peace with ourselves, with one another. Each person who desires to receive the Holy Body and Precious Blood must contact the parish priest for guidance concerning spiritual preparation, including the Mystery of Confession. How this is provided is up to the priest, keeping, nonetheless, the rules of social distancing and both wearing face masks at all times, even during the absolution prayer.

### **The Altar and Strana**

The priest and one assistant serve in the altar. The server should be a mature person. They must maintain physical distancing (6 Ft/ 2 Meters). The server must wear a mask at all times.

We suggest the amount of incense be limited and the censuring done only from the clerics. In other words, there is no censuring down the aisle.

Responses will be given by one cantor. If two cantors respond, they should be placed on opposite sides of the nave (antiphonal). In any case, the distance of 6 feet/2 meters physical distancing must be maintained by them. We exhort the cantors to refrain from embellishing or prolonging the responses.

### **Scheduling of Attendees**

Inasmuch as the number of persons allowable in the church is restricted and the parishes are not fully open, a system of identifying who would like to attend and who has attended must be established (See [Sign-in sheet during COVID-19 Pandemic](#)). It is up to the Parish Priest to establish this system. He may invite individuals willing to assist him in maintaining this system. To give others the opportunity to participate, the same individuals ought not to be repeatedly present at all services.

The method is to use an online signup system for attendance for Sunday Divine Liturgy, limiting the number of attendees according to both [State](#) and [CDC Guidelines/Health Canada \(Holy Synod May 1, 2020 Directive\)](#) It may be that this signup system may be by individual, personal telephone contact.

### **Occupancy in the Church**

Priest, one mature altar server, one or two cantors, usher(s), prescribed number of faithful.

There will be strict limits as to how many persons may participate depending on occupancy limits of the building, and physical distancing. Not all pews will be occupied.

It is necessary that signs ([English](#) | [Romanian](#) | [French](#)) be posted at entrances and throughout the building reminding parishioners of these guidelines. Someone should be stationed in the inside at the church door to count those who enter according to the list.

Ushers will meet attendees at the entrance and check a list with the names of those who have signed up for that particular service. This is in order to ensure the number of individuals in the building remains within determined limits ([State](#), [CDC](#) and [Health Canada](#)).

The usher will assign a place to each person or family group (as acceptable). The faithful must not re-position during the service. People of the same household may sit together.

Six (6) feet or two (2) meters distance between individuals or family units during services must be observed. Before the service, someone in charge should mark 6'x6' / 2x2 meters squares on the nave floor. This assures good order among those present.

Everyone entering the building must wear a face mask at all times throughout the service, removing it only if partaking of the Holy Eucharist and then replacing it.

Veneration of the icons must be with a reverent bow, with the sign of the cross, without physically touching the image.

[If possible, measure the temperature of each person entering the building using a no contact infrared thermometer.]

Additional markings will govern the distance between parishioners when lined up, such as for communion. The usher may remind individuals to maintain the prescribed distance.

### **Reception of the Holy Body and Precious Blood**

Inasmuch as the practice of the Orthodox Church has been to distribute the Holy Eucharist with a single spoon, we see no reason to alter this. (If anyone is not comfortable with this procedure, that person will wait until the civil restrictions are lifted.)

In order to receive communion, the faithful should tip their head back, opening their mouth wide, and the priest should tilt the spoon so that the Holy Mysteries fall into their mouth. (Note, while there may be contact, it is limited).

Immediately after consuming the holy gifts, the faithful should blot their lips with a paper napkin which is disposed of in a basket nearby and later burned. (Thus, **no communion cloth is used**).

### **Conclusion of the Service**

At the conclusion of the Liturgy, the priest will bless as per the tipica. There is no individual veneration of the cross by the faithful. At this time of limited participants, each person should come forward, bow to the priest and ask his blessing (“The blessing of the Lord be on you...”), but refrain from kissing the priest’s hand.

Anafora will not be distributed by the priest nor will the faithful take it individually. However, with care, a small portion may be put into a plastic or paper bag and placed on a table in a convenient location for those present to take home after the last blessing.

## **Disinfecting**

Hand sanitizers must be placed at stations at the entrance and in the bathrooms. Thorough cleaning must take place between each service by disinfecting high-contact surfaces regularly. A list of individuals willing to clean the church before and after services is absolutely essential to the continued use of the facilities. The priest is charged with identifying these persons and may designate one of them to be in charge.

## **REMINDER & CONCLUSION**

The above **ROEA ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENTS** are seemingly few. They presuppose that the priest has thoroughly read, understood and is implementing the “Absolute Requirements.”

Each diocese of our Church has determined the order for opening its churches. Nevertheless, they have all fundamentally followed the Holy Synod May 1, 2020 Directive, as have we.

Our gratitude to His Eminence, Archbishop MICHAEL of New York and New Jersey and His Eminence, Archbishop IRENEE of Toronto, for kindly furnishing us with some of their texts; to Chancellor David Oancea for reviewing and correcting the text, and Mr. Florin Ristache for Romanian language translations.

Also, sincere thanks to our Deans for their input, and also the clergy and laity who have kindly kept us informed of the state of their particular parish life.

Finally, our gratitude to His Grace, Bishop ANDREI, our Vicar Bishop for his patience.

During this long period of uncertainty regarding the liturgical life of the Episcopate, we alone determined the content of our three previous Directives and the present one, Directive for Pentecost.

We anticipate, by the grace of God, that the full life of the Orthodox Church in North America will soon restore itself.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Nathaniel". The signature is written in a cursive style.

+ NATHANIEL, Archbishop