

St. Mary's Orthodox Church

217 First Street – Coaldale Pa 18218-1602

Phone.....570-645-2772

OUR WEBSITE...www.stmarysnativity.org

Rector: V. Rev. James Weremedic
Retired Attached: V. Rev Paul Ropitsky
Choir Director: Wash King

Sunday, May 24, 2020
Sunday of the Blind Man
Tone 5

Prokeimenon – Tone 8 – Pray and make your vows / before the Lord our God!

Epistle Reading: Acts 16:16-34 Gospel Reading: John 9:1-38

Christ is Risen!

Indeed, He is Risen!

Khristos Voskrese! Voistinu Voskrese! Christos Anesti! Alithos Anesti!
El Messieh Kahm! Hakken Kahm! Cristo ha Resucitado! Verdaderamente ha Resucitado!

All Liturgical Services - This includes Divine Liturgy, Akathist, Vespers, Parastas, etc. and all meetings and events at the church are CANCELLED until further notice!

Please read the **Epistle, Gospel and Scripture Readings** on OCA website or use your bible with the Readings listed on the Church Calendar during this period of time.

MAY 24 – “WHO SINNED THAT THIS MAN WAS BORN BLIND?”

“The thought of someone being blind from birth touches even the hardest of hearts. Imagine never seeing a sunset, a field of flowers, a mountain range or a multitude of other natural wonders with which our Heavenly Father has blessed us.

With this in mind, today we commemorate the Sunday of the MAN BORN BLIND. It is touching to hear how our Lord gave him his sight. It is troubling, however, to note how the man was treated after his amazing good fortune!

Even before Christ performed this great miracle, the Apostles questioned their Master as to who was to blame for this man's handicap. Was it he, or his parents, who had sinned? The Lord explains that suffering should not be equated with sin! Throughout the course of normal events misfortune invades all of our lives, giving God opportunities to work His Power through us.

How shameful the Pharisees act when confronted with this miracle. There is no joy expressed by them. Instead, they were indignant that Christ would do such a thing on the Sabbath! When the former blind man would not acknowledge that the Man who healed him was a 'sinner,' the Pharisees cast him out from their midst. Theirs was a permanent 'blindness.'

The message of today's Gospel is clear: physical blindness is not nearly as bad as spiritual blindness. This is summarized beautifully in one of the verses from the Vespers for today: 'I come to you, O Lord, with the eyes of my soul as blind as the eyes of the man born blind. In repentance, I cry to you: you are the brilliant light for all of those in darkness.'

The Orthodox Weekly Bulletin Vestal, Cliffwood, New Jersey...USA

Please use this time to read the Scriptures, pray in your home and please pray for those on our prayer list.

Prayer List: HEAVENLY FATHER ... Physician of our souls and bodies, Who has sent your only begotten Son to heal every sickness and infirmity, visit us and heal us, Your servants, from all physical and spiritual ailments through the grace of Your Son Jesus Christ; grant to us patience in this sickness, strength of body and spirit, and recovery of health. Lord, You have taught us through Your word to pray for each other that we may be healed. You are the source of healing and to You, we give glory; to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Matushka Lovey Ropitsky, Matushka Lisa Weremedic, Michael Birosik, James Blair, Terry Blair, Clark Bogosh, Theodore Bogosh, Jane Bubernak, Cecil Buchanan, Stephanie Chmel, Edward Conarty, Mary Evetushick, Irene David, Ilene Devine, Gloria Ferri, Julia Forte, Olga Hebda, John King, Claire Kononchuk, Michael Kulick, John Kushnir, Nancy Lorchak, Dorothy Macenka, Helen Macenka, MaryAnn Macenka, Mary Maholick, Alexandra Miller, Courtney Miller, Mildred O'Shura, Anna Pisko, Helen Scheese, Melissa Schmitt, Althea Shellock, Helen Suda, Martha Stafiniak, Martha Teno, Nancy Vanno, Russell Wishousky, Russell Yallas, & Richard York

Local On-line Services:

Go to the Diocese of Eastern PA website at the bottom of our church website.

At the top of the page – Click on Live Streaming

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church – Mogadore, OH – You Tube

Services every day of the week – Mon. to Fri. at 7:00 PM; Sat. Vespers – 5:00 PM; Sun. D. Liturgy – 9:30 AM

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Our sympathy is extended to the family of Martha Stafiniak, on the passing away of her sister, Stephanie Porada (New Jersey) on 05-12-2020.
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If anyone is in need of a priest please call Father James Weremedic at 570-645-2772 Visitation of the Sick and Infirm: If you are going into the hospital for any reason, please inform Fr. James at the Rectory. Emergency Calls: Please call the Rectory (570-645-2772) anytime (day or night) in an emergency

Financials May 8-15, 2020 Operating Acct: -Dues 565 – Candles 0 – Weekly 307 – Non-Env 0 – Holy Days 60 – Altar Candles 90 – Pascha Offerings 10 – Donations 0 = Total **\$ 1,032.00**
Building Fund 0- ... Charity Donation 0- .. Furnace Fund 0-.. Cemetery 150- .. Flowers 0 ... **Thank you.**

Donation to Cemetery Fund in memory of parents, Nestor & Harriet Scarloss, and sisters, Mary Solomon & Olga Weiss offered by Stephanie Chmel

May Birthdays: 2- Lynn Sharpe, 17- Russell King, 17- Julia Forte, 21- Lindsey Ruch, 21- Gloria Ferri, 22- Andrew Miller 31- Marie Skripnek

May Wedding Anniversaries: 9 – Richard and Julie McHugh, 16- V. Rev Paul & Matushka Lovey Ropitsky

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Please keep filling your church envelopes
May 8-15 income –\$1,032.00; May 8-15 expenses - \$2,242.82
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May 20, 2020

St. Carantac, Welsh Prince who aided St Patrick

TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE BULLETIN AND POSTED ON THE PARISH WEBSITE

Continuing the Discussion --- the Process to Open our Parishes

"If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!" --- Benjamin Franklin

Dear Rev. Frs., esteemed members of the parish councils and faithful,

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen! This letter is primarily a revision of the past one, with updated information and clarification. Having read through all 700 surveys received so far, I realized that many comments submitted were made in ignorance of the guidelines and procedures already being put into place beyond those listed in the survey itself. Other comments are helpful in correcting and changing some of those and giving insights overlooked. Therefore, I insist the clergy and parish councils keep the faithful informed of the process and plans being developed. Given pushback on some guidelines, I realize perhaps explanations would be helpful. While we do not wish to stress the faithful with ever changing guidelines, as new information is received and as parishes begin to open, procedures will need to be adjusted. Please be patient.

So as to be inclusive of information already shared, I am using that text in order to keep all the information in one convenient place, but will highlight by underlining additions and corrections for simplicity's sake. This letter supersedes my previous letter, *BEGINNING THE DISCUSSION ---THE PROCESS TO OPEN OUR PARISHES, OF MAY 6th*.

In evaluating the data, in one Pennsylvania county 100% of the deaths were in a nursing home. The percentages from Pennsylvania records and the *CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL* demonstrate how dangerous the virus is for certain segments our population, especially the elderly with comorbidities. A simple side by side comparison of *DEATHS WITHIN A COUNTY ATTRIBUTED TO THE CORONAVIRUS* with *DEATHS ATTRIBUTED TO THE VIRUS WITHIN VARIOUS COUNTIES IN PERSONAL CARE HOMES AND NURSING HOMES* have some of the following numbers: 65%; 80%, 88%, 50%, 72%, 73%, 80%, 56%, 65%, 80%, and 77% respectively. This information, as well as *Rate of Infection by Age; Hospitalization Rates by Age Range to Date; County Case Counts to Date and COVID-19 Cases Associated with Nursing Homes and Personal Care Homes to Date*, may be found on this website: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Cases.aspx> (see attachments) Hopefully, having actual data from the state will assist the faithful in making wise decisions for their personal health and discerning the actual level of risk.

As you may have read our clergy participated in several video conferences over the last few weeks, the last of which was earlier today. First and foremost as a way of doing a wellness check with the clergy, get a sense of how they were doing, as well as the faithful entrusted to their care. Given these video conferences, I can say without hesitation, the clergy who participated have a grasp of the complexity involved as each parish has its own unique situation. The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America also met via video conference to discuss the care of the faithful, directives and a way forward on various occasions, most recently, April 29th and May 01st.

The reaction to simply asking clergy and parish councils to begin putting a plan in place for their parishes, was perceived as premature and threatening for some. This underscores all the more how necessary it is to begin discussions within every parish about "how," even before we talk about "when," a parish will reopen. Hopefully, our clergy can begin to address the concerns, fears, anxieties, and trauma in the wake of the coronavirus in an informed way. I remember a year ago seeing a billboard along SR 33 which read, "ALL FEELINGS ARE VALID!" and laughing at how ridiculous a statement it was. There can be a great gulf between feelings and reality. Nevertheless, while we must be mindful of feelings, fears, and anxiety, we cannot as a Church be paralyzed by them. *'He who fails to plans, plans to fail.'*

The Federal Government provided "*Guidelines OPENING UP AMERICA AGAIN,*" for moving forward responsibly. The *CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL* published guidelines, the governors of Pennsylvania and Delaware also issued directives and guidelines and finally the Holy Synod issued a *Pastoral Letter* and *SYNODAL DIRECTIVES Towards a Re-Opening of our Churches* on May 01, 2020. All of these various documents are helpful, requiring prayerful discernment, careful

reading, interpretation and application. The process to reopen will not be done unilaterally by any priest, parish council, parish or combination thereof. This is not the time for presumptive actions, wherein anyone is put at risk, especially as it may result in severe canonical consequences *or for liturgical innovations*. Therefore, I will address each one. We have a challenge to be creative in addressing 'how' we move forward responsibly when the time is right, but we cannot use creativity as license for irresponsibility.

Let me affirm my commitment to protect the most vulnerable as best we can, while seeing our parishes opened as fully as is safely and responsibly feasible. I want to affirm my love for our clergy, their families, our parishes and the faithful. While we are One, as an Orthodox Church, every parish is unique in its own composition, age groupings, health issues, normative attendance, building design and size, which directly affects application of the various guidelines and requirements provided. One must also consider one's proximity to the epicenters of the virus' adverse effects. A "one size fits all," approach is simply not feasible or practical, for the government, the Holy Synod or even the Diocese. Therefore, as we consider a path forward, we will do so with all these various policies and guidelines *in mind*, but realize that final discernment of their *interpretation and applicability* rests with the Bishop. If you have not done so, please ask you parish priest or council chair for the *password* for our online survey, REOPENING OUR PARISHES SURVEY, found at <https://doepa.org/reopeningsurvey> and take it as soon as possible. Some of the Safety Measures listed under Q10 will be deleted and others added. If this medium is unfamiliar to you, please ask your priest or parish council chair to send you a copy of the survey to complete and mail it back ASAP. This will help your priest in collaboration with your parish leadership to better prepare for the eventual reality of Liturgical services to resume in a responsible manner. A comprehensive plan of action must be submitted to the Diocesan Office for review and a blessing. We would like all surveys completed ASAP, as insufficient surveys will likely delay your priest and parish leadership in preparing adequately and delay the opening of the parish due to insufficient information.

FEDERAL and LOCAL GOVERNMENT --- First of all let me say that parishes in Pennsylvania and Delaware, in particular, and in the majority of states were **not** closed because of a state order. Nor were they closed by Federal order, either. The Holy Synod advised closing and/or limiting services for a variety of reasons, one of which was to be in concert with what the government was asking our country to do to flatten the curve and not overwhelm our healthcare systems. *Flattening the curve was intended to allow for those infected as well as those who would eventually be infected to have adequate access to healthcare, not eliminate the virus.* Further the intention was to safeguard our healthcare workers, first responders and others involved in caring for the elderly over this extended period of time. *That being said, as neither the Federal nor State governments told us to close we cannot and should not reasonably expect any direct governmental declaration specific to churches about our opening.* They have respected our First Amendment Rights. Therefore, if the criterion for returning to the Church is based upon the Federal or State governments to tell us we can now return to our Churches, we would be waiting in vain.

Governmental concerns about the trajectory of the infection rate for specific areas must absolutely be heard and followed. We will look to their guidelines for direction to protect our faithful and surrounding communities keeping in mind the "*Guidelines OPENING UP AMERICA AGAIN,*" acknowledges discretion is required by the state, "*State and local officials may need to tailor the application of these criteria to local circumstances (e.g., metropolitan areas that have suffered severe COVID outbreaks, rural and suburban areas where outbreaks have not occurred or have been mild).*" Basically, there is a recognition that places like New York City and Philadelphia, which were hit hard must be dealt with differently than areas less populated and were not affected to the same degree, as Williamsport, Mechanicsburg or even Uniondale.

If this reasonable caveat provided by our Federal government is ignored, within our states, I am willing to listen to appeals from parishes adversely affected and consider moving ahead *where the data does not support improper restrictions*. Why? Because if the state is allowing other counties with more people infected people per 100,000 to have restrictions loosened, it does not make sense for a county with less infections per 100,000 to have tighter ones. Therefore, I am willing evaluate the trajectory and make decisions as appropriate to the actual demographics. Realistic plans require work, thinking, responsible creativity and sharpening the pencil. Even as I write law suits are being filed

against State governments with the Supreme Court for abuse of power, unlawful seizure of assets and basically to apply reasonable discretion.

Even so, the metric in Pennsylvania for moving from RED (the severest restrictions) to YELLOW (less restrictive) is based upon the formula: A county will need to have a cumulative number of new infections less than 50 new cases per 100,000 people daily for 14 days. Wayne County, PA for example, is still considered RED, yet they have only had 104 (on May 6th, when this letter was originally written) confirmed cases since the beginning of the pandemic. Northumberland County will remain Red, but only has 98 (on May 6th, now 136, with no deaths) confirmed cases as of this date. We will certainly be watching each county's infection rate for increases, but blanket declarations without the considerations provided for local discretion is not appropriate policy (see "Guidelines OPENING UP AMERICA AGAIN," footnote on the page entitled, PROPOSED STATE OR REGIONAL GATING CRITERIA). Additionally, in the document, "Guidelines OPENING UP AMERICA AGAIN," Phase One, SPECIFIC STYPES OF EMPLOYERS, LARGE VENUES it states, (e.g., sit-down dining, movie theaters, sporting venues, *places of worship*) can operate under strict physical distancing protocols. Physical distancing (6' between individuals of different households) is quite different from restricting numbers.

CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL --- The *recommendations* from the *CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL* on social distancing (6' from other persons) with a limit of ten persons pertains more to small enclosed places. If a building safely accommodates larger numbers, *there is absolutely prohibition* for more than ten. We can still maintain 6' of social distancing in our churches without being fixated on an inapplicable number. I do not want to come across as dismissive in any way of the CDC, governmental or Synodal guidelines. Interesting formulas have been suggested based upon square footage and the number of people. Please let us use common sense and understand sound judgment. If five people ride to church together from a single household, we are not going to make them sit 6' apart once they enter the Church. The guidelines mentioned above are precisely that, guidelines. They provide vital *advice* and information for our protection and the overall welfare of the public's health and safety. Yet, we need to be mindful of the spirit in which they were written and not bound by a misreading or inappropriate application. Let us keep in mind, 'painting with a broad brush has its place and there are times for a very fine brush.' *A careful reading of the documents actually allows for adjustments based upon actual data.* Please be at peace!

SYNODAL DIRECTIVES Towards a Re-Opening of our Churches --- The members of the Holy Synod are thoroughly aware of the complexities involved with reopening the parishes of their own respective Diocesan parishes. As mentioned above, we cannot move forward with a stilted perspective of 'one size fits all,' or 'painting with a too broad a brush'. The Holy Synod fully recognizes each Bishop will need to make decisions based upon the unique situation of the respective state's laws and mandates, where it is applicable and what is appropriate where and when. None of us claim to be Omni-competent. Even as your bishop, I realize, we cannot make one plan for the entire Diocese, to do so would be require us to look at the most severe situations and impose restrictions on the whole Diocese, which are markedly dissimilar.

LET US GET DOWN TO THE BRASS TACKS

Within our Diocese we have parishes that easily allow for social distancing and others that require creative approaches. I ask you to think resourcefully to address this unique and unprecedented situation. The clergy are to work with their parish councils or committees to examine their own unique situations. We must attempt to accommodate all who desire to attend, pray and receive the Holy Mysteries, while maintaining proper standards of social distancing, facial masks, hygiene, etc. *These Guidelines are not exhaustive, but considered minimal for the present, and unfortunately be modified, expanded and hopefully later reduced and / or eliminated as we move forward.*

1. All clergy and parish councils *must* to begin the work of addressing what will need to be done when the parish can open its doors to whatever degree possible (This itself will be taxing spiritually, emotionally, physically and psychologically);
2. All clergy and parish councils *must* consider for the *immediate* allowance for people to simply come at designated times, to pray and light a candle, as our people desperately need the consolation of what is considered Sacred Space and Sacred Time. (An adequately appointed outdoor shrine is also encouraged

- as this possibility may also be added as well. *The priest may need to enlist the assistance of council members or parishioners to assist with opening the Church and cleaning afterwards.*);
3. Additional Liturgical services may need to be added to accommodate the more vulnerable or young families, as we proceed in the process. Live Stream or a monitor in a separate part of the facility to accommodate them may be needed;
 4. The faithful must be educated on Christian charity toward those who may need to go in and out with *or without* children more frequently due to facial masks, restlessness, etc., rather than simply forbidding them to come. Alternately, young parents and small children could watch via live stream from the hall or a classroom. (Thank God they are there!);
 5. Outdoor services when weather permits is a fully acceptable option as it is the practice during pilgrimages at many monasteries. *Our goal must be to serve our people while keeping everyone safe. Proper precautions must remain in place*
 6. Each priest in collaboration with their parish council (or in the absence of an assigned Rector, the parish council in consultation with their Dean) must submit a plan for reopening their respective parish, in consideration of the following:
 - a. The current level of infection and the projected trajectory of the virus within their county and the level of restrictions placed upon the respective county (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/usa/pennsylvania/>);
 - b. The CDC Guidelines for cleaning are to be followed and a plan developed (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>);
 - c. The Holy Synod Directives are to be followed where applicable (*If necessary, I am willing to participate in a Zoom Meeting at any point during this process*);
 - d. Adequate responses to the RE-OPENING THE PARISH SURVEY from parishioners and concerns addressed within *the competency of the priest and parish council. (The surveys are specifically intended to assist the priest and parish council in this process, therefore extraneous comments unrelated to the competency of the parish priest and parish council are not helpful)*. Admittedly, there are parishes where this information will be more vital to the process than others;
 - e. Posting of all necessary posters and website posters as provided by the Diocesan Office (*We will make every effort to provide you posters via email with instructions on where to post.*);
 - f. No parish will be compelled to open in a premature manner, but all parishes *must* begin discussion of a plan and submit it for approval in a timely manner (failure to do so on the part of a priest may be reasonably perceived as dereliction of duties by the faithful);
 - g. Information on Live Streaming must be made available, even if it is not from your own parish for those unable to attend regardless of the reason;
 - h. No one should be shamed or feel coerced to return before they can comfortably attend (Their *reasonable* concerns should be taken into consideration in developing a plan)
 - i. All priest over 65 and / or with major health concerns which place them at a higher risk, must request Hierarchical approval before serving, in accordance with the Synodal Directive;
 - j. Anyone who is currently sick or displaying symptoms of the coronavirus must be told to stay at home, graciously, lovingly, but without hesitation;
 - k. All parishioners will be required to wear a mask, a modest supply is suggested, Children up to 10 years old are exempt, however, those over 2 years of age are encouraged to do so if possible.;
 - l. Records must be kept regarding who attended each service in case there is an outbreak;
 - m. *Contrary to The Safety Measures listed in the Parish Surveys, the laity are NOT to bring a throw for their personal space or a pillow case to cover the top of the pew in front of them, as these could be sources of contamination.*

OTHER MATTERS OF WHICH TO BE MINDFUL AND CREATIVE SUGGESTIONS

- l. Live Streaming to a separate part of the facilities for families with young children who are resistant to masks or for the elderly;

- II. Saturday or a weekday Liturgy for high risk persons and Sunday Liturgy for families with young children (Alternately, this could be rotated from week to week);
- III. Parishes with limited space and larger numbers may need to consider the use of their parish hall for Divine Services, adding another day for at risk persons to attend or Live Streaming for persons who may not fit into the limited worship space, but still able to be present within the facility;
- IV. Minimize parishioner contact with surfaces, e.g., a person or persons appointed to open doors for entry into the church. The doors from the Narthex to the Nave should be left open (MANDATORY, but alternate plans may be submitted);
- V. Hand sanitizer must be provided in appropriate areas, i.e., entrances, elevators, etc. and supplies regularly checked (MANDATORY);
- VI. Every parishioner must wear a mask, except the clergy who are serving and the choir (MANDATORY). Please let us voluntarily accept restrictions for the sake of others, as St Paul instructs in Romans 14:1ff, let us not have strife over masks or other matters, but let everything be done in love and in consideration of others. *“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”* (Those under 2 years of age are exempt as it is medically contraindicated.);
- VII. Choirs are to be moved to the front of the Nave and limited as social distancing dictates (MANDATORY). (This will minimize any contamination associated with Choir members projecting their voices over the top of other people. While choir members are not required to wear masks, they are to be mindful of not projecting too loudly or projecting towards another member of the choir);
- VIII. Markers indicating proper distancing for Holy Communion are to be placed upon the floor. THE PRIEST WILL THEN SAY, “The servant of God N., partakes of the Precious and All-Holy Body and Blood of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, unto the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting”, BEFORE THE COMMUNICANT COMES FORWARD TO RECEIVE. (MANDATORY);
- IX. Paper towels or Kleenex may be used instead of a communion cloths, held by the communicant and placed in a respectfully placed in a basket for burning (a new cloth must be used for each family household and properly hand washed between services. The intention here is to not possibly contaminate the communion cloth by wiping everyone’s face with the same cloth and then inadvertently pass anything on to someone else. This is a very different issue than the use of the spoon for administering the Body and Blood of Christ. The spoon is cleansed each time it is immersed in the Life Giving Mysteries by the Sacred Body and Blood itself. Therefore, to do anything different would be to deny the Real Presence of Christ in the Life Giving Mysteries.);
- X. Candles will be placed in the candle stands in advance for a designated person to light (alternate proposal will be considered. The faithful are encouraged to include the donation for candles within their offering envelope. It is expressly forbidden to engage in making change as money is easily contaminated);
- XI. Windows are to be opened if possible to provide fresh air;
- XII. Air Condition / Furnace Filters must be changed regularly. Dirty return air vents and dirty air supplies indicate dirt is being circulated and filters are not being changed according to manufacturer recommendations. The fan for the air system should remain off if it is a closed system which only recirculates air.;
- XIII. Offering baskets *are not to be passed*, a basket in front of the icon of Christ or another designated place;

- XIV. Parish Websites and Social Media should instruct potential visitors from other parishes to follow proper protocol, by contacting the parish priest in advance to insure the parish is able to accommodate them and inquire about the disciplines temporarily mandated (A posting to this effect should be placed on your website).
- XV. The clergy together with the parish council must develop a punch list of items to be addressed before and after each service and designate who is responsible, e.g., verifying the church is cleaned, adequate hand sanitizer remains at each location, hand soap, paper towels, Kleenex and other supplies are sufficient, etc.;
- XVI. Utilization of ushers to maintain social distancing and while insuring space is maximized in parishes where this could be problematic (We may need to let people know that someone may instruct them where to sit to maximize our ability to accommodate, therefore people may not be able to sit where they have always sat. Ushers may be needed to stagger seating to maximize space. This may include asking family grouping to sit together at one end of a pew, and the next row be seated at the opposite end, for example. The faithful who are already gathering together outside the Church without social distancing, should be encouraged to sit together as a group in the Church as well.)
- XVII. The clergy and parish councils are required to appoint a person to ask about coronavirus symptoms of all persons entering the Church, e.g., Fever, Cough, Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, Diarrhea, Chills, Repeated shaking with chills, Muscle pain, Headache, Sore throat, New loss of taste or smell before they enter the Nave. A touchless thermometer for temperature checks may assist in putting some of the faithful at ease.

Please forgive the length of the letter and directives. In no respect should this letter or any attachments be considered exhaustive. We are simply providing direction as each priest and parish council evaluates what needs to be done on the local level. I would ask that each of you be loving and patient with one another, giving your full cooperation for the good of the Church. I offer my heartfelt thanks to those who completed the Parish Surveys, as there were a number of helpful ideas brought forward.

We have all been wounded in one way or another over the past two months. From our surveys I see there some who believe we do not need to follow any precautions, or less stringent precautions and others feel they are not strong enough. St Paul taught the Corinthian church a very basic Christian principle of being deferential to others in matters of conscience. Let us keep the words of the Apostle Paul ever before us from I Corinthians 10:23ff:

Do All to the Glory of God

“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 26 For “the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.” 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— 29 I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

I ask with tears, please let us strive for the greater good.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+ MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania



The Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA AND EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia

May 19, 2020

Commemoration of the Fall of Jerusalem in 614 AD to the Persians,
With the loss of the True Cross to Persia,
Damage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre by fire,
And the martyrdom of over 65,000 Christians

**TO BE POSTED ON ALL PARISH WEBSITES, PARISH SOCIAL MEDIA
AND PARISH ENTRANCES**

THE TRADITIONAL PROTOCOL FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS VISITING ANOTHER PARISH

Dear to God,

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen! As we see the easing of restrictions and parishes begin to move forward with various approaches to reopening their doors, we must continue to be mindful of proper social distancing and the ability of our local parishes to accommodate the faithful. In some parishes this will not be as big a challenge as in others. Some clergy and parish councils will need to be fully engaged with responsible and creative approaches, especially if the CDC guidelines remain in place for an extended period of time.

As the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, we never want to see anyone turned away who seeks to offer themselves, their thanksgiving and praise to God for all He has done for them. God forbid! We will not deny any practicing Orthodox Christian in good standing the Life-Giving Mysteries, regardless of temporal matters, such as parish or jurisdictional affiliation, *if we have the ability to accommodate them*. Absolutely no one should be turned away simply because it presents an inconvenience or requires more work on our part. Christ gave His Life for the salvation of the Whole World, what is it for us to make adjustments for our brothers and sisters in Christ!

The historic practice of the Orthodox Church requires an Orthodox Christian who intends to visit another parish other than his or her own to contact the parish priest in advance. This is critical, especially now as we have implemented safety precautions to protect the most vulnerable within society. As we do not want to give offense, we must insist ALL ORTHODOX FAITHFUL visiting a parish other than his or her own, contact the clergy in advance so that he can inform you of protocols being implemented and to determine if the parish has the ability to responsibly receive you. Please access the directory for our parishes at the following link: <https://doepa.org/parishes>.

Yours in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania



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Telephone: 484.281.3406 * <http://www.doepa.org> * Email: diocesoeopa@gmail.com
Chancellor: V. Rev. Raymond Martin Browne * Mobile: 570.906.1388
Diocesan Treasurer: Mark Linnehan * treasurer@doepa.org

"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." Augustine