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*Orthodox Church in America*  
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**Bulgarian Diocese, Orthodox Church in America**  
**Directives for Reopening Parishes**

**Stages for Opening the Churches.**

<b>Federal Guidelines</b>	<b>Holy Synod Stages</b>	
Phase I	0	Services are completely suspended
	1	Sunday liturgy served by limited cohort
	2	Additional weekly liturgies served by limited cohort
	3	The Divine Office is offered by a limited cohort
Phase II	4	Adding parishioners to liturgical cohort according to limits set by civil directives; Allowance for Baptisms, Reception of Converts, in person Confession, Marriages, with strict limits on attendance
	5	Allowance for in person meetings: Parish Council, Coffee Fellowship according to limits set by civil decrees Allowance for Baptisms, Reception of Converts, in person Confession, Marriages, with slight loosening for limits on attendance
	6	Careful increase of the number of parishioners to liturgical cohort according to limits set by civil directives Allowance for Baptisms, Reception of Converts, in person Confession, Marriages, with equivalent loosening for limits on attendance
Phase III	7	Continued increase of activity that leads to full re-opening

*Synodal Directives Towards a Re-opening of our Churches, May 1, 2020*

## **I. General Guidelines for All Stages**

### **1. It is the responsibility of the parish priest to be aware of COVID-19 directives and healthcare guidelines in your respective civil jurisdictions, particularly of the restrictions placed on houses of worship.**

- a. Please also note that state and local directives may differ.
- b. Print up the fact sheet at the following link and post it at entry ways into your church, including the front doors:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>

### **2. Social Distancing:**

- a. At all stages in the Holy Synod Directives for reopening our parishes, until local civil authorities say otherwise, **social distancing protocols are non-negotiable**.
- b. To determine the maximum social distancing occupancy of your Nave, get the area of your Nave and input this data into the calculator on the website at the following link:  
<https://www.banquettablespro.com/social•distancing•room•space•calculator>
  - Parishes with pews must take the area of the pews, not the full nave.
  - The number you will use for your maximum social distancing occupancy will be the Seven (7) Feet Apart result.
  - Depending on the configuration of your Nave, you may be able to count one space for social distancing as one household instead of one individual. If you think this might apply to your church, contact the Chancellor for confirmation.
- c. Clearly mark where faithful may stand/sit in the Nave; in the Narthex put up a sign indicating that people may only stand/sit in designated areas.

### **3. Veneration of sacred objects and the reception of blessings will continue to be "contactless"**

### **4. Vulnerable populations:**

- a. Clergy and faithful 65 years of age and older without underlying medical conditions may attend services if they choose to.
- b. Before clergy in these populations may celebrate the divine services, they must obtain a blessing from Archbishop Alexander.

**5. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

- a. In local jurisdictions that mandate face coverings in public gatherings, all present at a service, except for those serving or singing, must bring masks to wear.
- b. In local jurisdictions recommending face coverings, all present at a service, except for those serving or singing, may bring masks to wear if they so desire.

**6. Rectors must petition Archbishop Alexander in writing by sending an email through the Chancellor with a request to move to a subsequent Stage of opening**

- a. Your letter of request must include evidence that this move will not contravene directives of local civil authorities.
- b. His Eminence will review your petition, in consultation with the Spiritual Council, and give you his response.

**7. Parish priests must make it clear to the faithful that movement from one stage to another can occur in both directions.**

- a. Restrictions may be brought back if deemed necessary by local civil authorities, Archbishop Alexander, or the Holy Synod.
  - Should the city or county in which a parish is located experience a spike in COVID-19 infections and become a “hot spot,” assuming that local civil authorities will then allow services by a limited cohort, the parish will return to Stage 3.

**8. Religious education programming for children may resume when local boards of education have resumed on-site or in-person lessons.****9. Nurseries/Family Rooms are to remain closed until local civil authorities have approved the opening of day care facilities. Once opened, they must be thoroughly cleaned after every use.**

- a. In a related matter, please note the following from the Holy Synod guidelines: "Because of social distancing guidelines, small children who cannot remain close to a parent during services will have to remain home." Priests need to monitor for such situations and respond accordingly. It is recommended you address these situations on a case-by-case basis, through a pastoral conversation with the parents involved.

## II. Stages 1-3

### **1. Moving through Stages 1-3:**

- a. Archbishop Alexander is not limiting the amount of services celebrated in our parishes. Therefore, when your local civil authorities permit religious services with **no more than 10 people present**, you may petition to move directly to Stage 3.

### **2. If blessed to proceed to Stage 3:**

- a. You may increase the number of attendees at your services to no more than the maximum allowed by your local civil authority, up to 10 people.
  - If you are going to have faithful attending services in rosters (i.e. a different group of people at each service) each respective group must have the same people every time; faithful cannot switch from one group to another. For more important information on this, see item "c" in this section.
- b. You may celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and holy days, together with other services that you would typically celebrate on your calendar throughout the Church year.
- c. Services will be celebrated by a limited cohort consisting of priest (deacon), one server, and a chanter; if your parish will be live streaming services on the internet, you may also have one person to work as videographer.
  - Your cohort must consist of the same people every time; no rotating rosters.
  - Please note that the number of this cohort forms part of the 10 people in attendance; it is not the cohort plus 10.
- d. Except for Funerals, sacraments and other services of necessity ("Treby") may not be celebrated.
  - Funerals must be served according to local civil directives and funeral directors' protocols.
- e. Confessions may be heard by appointment only. When hearing Confessions:
  - Maintain social distancing protocols
  - Meet outdoors, if possible
  - For the Absolution Prayer, simply hold up the stole from a distance

### **3. Other considerations**

- a. Always maintain social distancing protocols.

### III. Stage 4

**1. To petition for a move to Stage 4, local civil directives must permit houses of worship to hold in-person services with more than 10 people present.**

a. Your petition must include a schematic (drawing) of your temple's social distancing plan.

**2. If blessed to proceed to Stage 4:**

a. You are limited to the celebration of the divine services. Fellowship events, meetings, and classes must take place via electronic means only.

b. In Stage 4, you may increase the number of attendees at your services to no more than 50% of your maximum social distancing occupancy (see Part I, 2.b).

c. Before your first service with more faithful in attendance, have the church thoroughly cleaned. It is recommended that you use a professional cleaning company with experience in disinfecting for communicable diseases.

d. You must provide hand sanitizer at all the entrances to your temple.

e. Consider using only one entrance into the building to keep track of the number and flow of people.

f. If possible, lock parts of your site that are not being used (e.g. fellowship hall, classrooms).

g. Remove all prayer books and other literature from your Narthex and Nave, including bulletins, newsletters, pamphlets.

h. Collection plates are not to be passed during services; an alternate form of receiving offerings must be in use.

i. You may add one more altar server to your cohort

- Unless actively engaged in a liturgical function (e.g. entrances), the two servers must remain on opposite sides of the altar.

j. The number of singers you may add will depend on how many your *kleros* or choir loft can hold while maintaining proper social distancing protocols.

### 3. The Divine Liturgy

- a. You will need ushers (ideally two) who will be responsible for:
  - ensuring that people use hand sanitizer when they come into the Narthex
  - ensuring that attendees practice social distancing as they enter and exit the temple
  - directing faithful to the marked areas in the Nave (see Part I, 2.c)
  
- b. Regarding Holy Communion:
  - Use a high-alcohol wine (e.g. Kagor, port), and very hot zeon at the time of Communion
  - Establish a system whereby faithful are not lining up close together while waiting to receive the Holy Gifts. One suggestion is to have them remain in their places and have the ushers call them up, one household at-a-time.
  - At the time of Holy Communion, priests will use two or three spoons in a glass of pure grain alcohol; switch spoons after each household has received.
    - NOTE: This directive, based on the words of St. Paul — "To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak" (1 Corinthians 9:22), and, "Now we who are strong should bear the weaknesses of the weak, and not just please ourselves," (Romans 15:1) — is the current practice established by the Church of Russia during the COVID-19 outbreak and is based upon a reference in The Rudder by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite.
  - You may offer *zapivka* and *antidoron*, only if you can do so in an individual manner.
  
- c. In order to allow as many faithful as possible to attend the Divine Liturgy:
  - You will need a system in place that allows the faithful to attend Liturgies in turns (e.g., Sign-up Genius • <https://www.signupgenius.com>).
  - You may schedule other Liturgies throughout the week.

### 4. "Treby" services (Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, Confessions, etc.)

- a. You may schedule "Treby" services, but they must be attended by only immediate family and the bare minimum faithful necessary for the service.
  - For example, wedding parties may only include the bride, groom, and sponsors (best man & maid/matron of honor), no other attendants, ring bearers, etc.

- Funerals must be served according to local civil directives and funeral directors' protocols.
- c. For family and friends that cannot attend these services, you may offer to live stream them, if you are able.

## 5. Other considerations

- a. You may schedule times during the week for people to come to church and pray.
- These times must be monitored.
- b. After the temple has been used for any service or personal devotional time, anything that people might have touched must be properly cleaned and disinfected.
- c. Always maintain social distancing protocols.

## IV. Stage 5

- 1. You may petition for a move to Stage 5 when local civil directives allow houses of worship to have up to 50 people at services. Without specific directives for houses of worship, you may petition when civil authorities allow for social gatherings of up to 50 people.**
- 2. If blessed to proceed to Stage 5:**
  - a. You may increase the number of attendees at your services to 75% of your maximum social distancing occupancy (see Part I, 2.b).
  - b. You may now also increase the number of attendees at "Treby" services to 50% of your maximum social distancing occupancy. The reason for the lower number of attendees at "Treby" services is that it will likely be more difficult to manage their movement into and out of the church.
    - Funerals must be served according to local civil directives and funeral directors' protocols.
  - c. In-person meetings and fellowship gatherings may be scheduled according to limits set by civil decrees for social gatherings.
    - Regarding coffee hours after services, priests must check for any discrepancies between the limits set for worship services and those set for social gatherings; if the number of people allowed for worship services is higher than the number for social gatherings, this could create a problem keeping numbers down at coffee hour.

- For meals and/or coffee & donuts or other fellowship involving the serving or distribution of food and drink: single use plates, cups, and utensils must be placed in a manner that only one item is touched in the taking (e.g., plates laid out separately rather than stacked together). Those who serve the food must wear masks and gloves and use utensils to serve the food.

### **3. Other considerations**

- a. As numbers increase at services, including at "Treby" services, someone must be on hand to ensure that proper social distancing protocols are adhered to when attendees are entering and exiting the building and going to their places in the Nave.
- b. After services, meetings, or fellowship gatherings, the areas of your site that were in use must be properly cleaned and disinfected.
- c. Always maintain social distancing protocols.

## **V. Stage 6**

**1. You may petition for a move to Stage 6 when local civil directives allow houses of worship to have up to 100 people at services. Without specific directives for houses of worship, you may also petition when civil authorities allow for social gatherings of up to 100 people.**

**2. If blessed to proceed to Stage 6:**

- a. You may increase the number of attendees at your services to your maximum social distancing occupancy (see Part I, 2.b).
- b. You may now also increase the number of attendees at "Treby" services to 75% of your maximum social distancing occupancy.
  - Funerals must be served according to local civil directives and funeral directors' protocols.
  - If it is your usual practice, you may begin hearing Confessions at scheduled times (e.g. Saturday after Vespers). Other guidelines re Confession remain in place.

### **3. Other considerations**

- a. Always maintain social distancing protocols.

## **VI. Stage 7**

- 1. You may petition for a move to Stage 7, when local civil directives allow an attendance of over 100 people at services or social gatherings.**
- 2. If blessed to proceed to Stage 7:**
  - a. You may now increase the number of attendees at "Treby" to your maximum social distancing occupancy (see Part I, 2.b).