



# BULGARIAN DIOCESE — OF TOLEDO — Orthodox Church in America

519 Brynhaven Drive, Oregon, OH 43616

**ARCHBISHOP ALEXANDER**  
Diocesan Prelate

Office: 419-693-9540  
Fax: 419-693-9541  
Mobile: 419-690-9979  
Email: alexander@bdoca.org

Prot. 05252021

The third finding of the precious head of the holy prophet, forerunner, and baptist John

Beloved in the Lord,

Christ is risen!

Please read below my updated directives for COVID -19 precautions in our God-saved Diocese of Toledo. These are to be shared with all parishioners via parish bulletins and/or email lists immediately.

In the joy of Christ's Resurrection, I remain, yours in Christ

Archbishop of Toledo and the Bulgarian Diocese - *Orthodox Church in America*

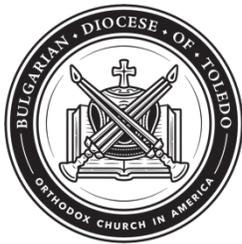
## **POST-PANDEMIC DIRECTIVES FOR PARISHES, MISSIONS, MONASTERY AND HERMITAGE** **25 May 2021**

The following directives are obligatory for all parishes and missions, the monastery and hermitage in our God-saved Diocese of Toledo.

This new guidance permits parishes to discontinue my previous directives on June 1, where permitted by the civil authorities. However, each rector / priest-in-charge is welcome to continue with their previously planned date of June 20, Holy Pentecost, for their re-opening plan.

Bear in mind that while no COVID-19 vaccine is 100% effective, the most recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) surrounding the resumption of "normal activity" is based on the observation that even though there is a chance vaccinated individuals will contract the virus, they are all but guaranteed to avoid serious illness or hospitalization resulting from a COVID-19 infection. For this reason I have decided that those who wish to minimize risk of serious illness have been given adequate opportunity to do so.

1. First and foremost, receiving a COVID-19 vaccine is a choice - nobody should feel compelled or coerced to receive the vaccine. It is clear that the ethical issues surrounding COVID-19 vaccines specifically are no less complex than the broader issues related to modern medicine in general. Our bishops, along with bishops throughout the Orthodox world, have broadly embraced the morality of COVID-19 vaccinations to aid in the alleviation of suffering and death. In an effort to maintain unity within our communities, clergy in the diocese should refrain from vocalizing positions that cast a pall on the morality of the various COVID-19 vaccines - sowing dissent among the faithful in the process. If members of the clergy question the use of the vaccine or face coverings (for one reason or another), they are to refrain from sharing these opinions. The faithful should be encouraged (likewise) to hold these types of opinions privately and to treat all with charity and love.



# BULGARIAN DIOCESE

## — OF TOLEDO —

### Orthodox Church in America

519 Brynhaven Drive, Oregon, OH 43616

**ARCHBISHOP ALEXANDER**  
Diocesan Prelate

Office: 419-693-9540  
Fax: 419-693-9541  
Mobile: 419-690-9979  
Email: [alexander@bdoca.org](mailto:alexander@bdoca.org)

2. Anyone in the parish or mission, including clergy, who exhibits coronavirus symptoms (including loss of taste/smell, respiratory issues, shortness of breath, fever, fatigue, muscle aches, sore throat etc.) must refrain from attending services and seek medical attention as appropriate. Their return to parish life should happen no sooner than 10 days after symptom onset *or* with a negative covid test *and* cessation of symptoms. Further, if anyone attends with obvious, visible COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms, it is the responsibility of the priest (or a designated, tactful parish council member) to assure that the ill person is informed of this directive, and asked to please return home until they are well. Take note that while sneezing is not a typical COVID-19 symptom, and can be attributed to allergies, a persistent cough cannot be reliably considered allergy related. In short, “It’s allergies,” should *not* be a commonly accepted reason to dismiss symptoms as irrelevant.
3. While the current CDC guidance encourages the removal of masks for the vaccinated *only*, I recognize the challenge of maintaining separate standards for the vaccinated and unvaccinated; therefore separate masking standards for the vaccinated and unvaccinated will not be undertaken in the Diocese.
4. Since there cannot be an expectation that the unvaccinated will wear masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19, it should be stressed to parishioners that everyone is welcome (and encouraged) to continue wearing face coverings if there is any level of discomfort with the new guidance. In short, while I bless cessation of masking requirements in the parish, every priest should be quite clear with their parishioners that everyone *may* continue wearing face coverings.
5. There will be no tolerance for “mask shaming” toward those who choose to continue wearing them. Additionally, if parishioners are not comfortable with the cessation of precautions, some pastoral accommodation should be sought.
6. There will almost certainly be COVID-19 outbreaks among the unvaccinated (this is defined as confirmed case(s) among 2 or more households) especially in situations where a large number of parishioners have not been vaccinated. If an outbreak is traced back to a service at the parish or a parish activity, rectors / priests-in-charge are expected to a) immediately notify the parish of the situation, b) cancel services and c) notify Archpriest Andrew Jarmus, Diocesan Chancellor, about the situation. Your re-opening schedule will be decided in consultation with the Diocesan Chancellor and not at the parish level.
7. High-risk individuals who have not been vaccinated should be expressly encouraged to continue wearing masks (though this will not be mandated).
8. If any rector/priest-in-charge has not yet planned their parish cessation of precautions, they should contact the Diocesan Chancellor immediately to discuss their concerns.
9. Finally, if any member of the diocese, clergyman or laity, has any concerns or questions about these directives and/or their implementation (or failure to do so), please bring this to the attention of the Chancellor of the Diocese: [ajarmus@bdoca.org](mailto:ajarmus@bdoca.org)

25 May 2021

Archbishop of Toledo and the Bulgarian Diocese - *Orthodox Church in America*