



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

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**Guidelines for the Diocese of New York and New Jersey,
On the Continuing Re-Opening of Our Churches, Missions, and Chapels
Issued May 26, 2021**

Beloved Clergy and Faithful of Our Diocesan Family:
Christ is Risen! – Indeed He is Risen!

Thanks be to Almighty GOD for His faithfulness and His countless blessings! Truly it is fitting that during this joy-filled season between Holy Pascha and Pentecost, when the Risen Lord and His disciples rejoiced in His victory over death, so too does our Diocesan family rejoice in the triumph of *communion* and *community* over isolation and fear. We reach out with love and care to those who have yet to return in person to their parishes. We commend into the loving Lord's hands all those whom this pandemic has claimed. And, we pledge – Archbishop, clergy, and laity – to pour ourselves into the continuing reopening of our churches, missions, and chapels, as lighthouses of hope to all who have endured the painful journey of the pandemic.

As has been widely publicized, updated recommendations have been issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Essentially, the CDC recommends that masks and social distancing need no longer be mandated for those persons who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

The State of New York has announced that, effective Wednesday, May 19, fully vaccinated persons are no longer required to wear masks or to be socially distanced in most settings. Most indoor capacity restrictions have been lifted in New York State. Social distancing is still required by New York State for venues that are following the CDC guidelines, where unvaccinated persons are in attendance.

The State of New Jersey has announced that effective this Friday, May 28, New Jersey will discontinue the mandatory wearing of masks indoors in public, for persons who have been fully vaccinated. Civil social distancing requirements will also be discontinued for many New Jersey sites, including churches.

In consideration of these civil directives, the following guidelines are announced with respect to the liturgical and fellowship activities of the churches, missions, and chapels of the Diocese.

For Churches in the State of New York:

- Persons who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are not required to wear masks in church, nor to be socially distanced. However, anyone wishing to wear a mask, and/or be socially distanced, may do so.
- For their own safety, and protection, unvaccinated persons should continue to wear masks and be socially distanced from other persons without masks.
- Persons 65 years and older, persons with medical conditions that increase their susceptibility to COVID-19, and particularly persons in these groups who are not fully vaccinated, should continue to exercise caution with respect to wearing masks at church and being socially distanced.
- The maximum indoor gathering limit of the church may be increased to 250 persons, in consonance with the current New York State civil directive.
- Parishes can provide temple space for those who continue to wear masks and be socially distanced.
- The temple and other facilities used by the parish will continue to be sanitized at least once per week.
- On the condition that the temple is sanitized as required above, the kissing of the Cross, the Holy Icons, and other sacred objects of veneration may be resumed.
- With respect to the distribution of Holy Communion:
 - o If the traditional practice of giving the Holy Mysteries with one spoon has been suspended, then the parish priest, at his discretion, may resume doing so. However, the parish priest, at his discretion, may continue to follow the previous Diocesan directives regarding the use of multiple spoons and the cleansing of the spoon or spoons between communicants.

- If the traditional practice of using the common Communion cloth held under the Chalice for cleansing of communicants' lips has been suspended, then the parish priest, at his discretion, may resume doing so. The parish priest may announce to communicants that they have the option to use the common cloth, rather than individual tissues. However, the clergy may continue to offer communicants the option of bringing individual tissues to cleanse their lips, then placing the tissues in a dedicated container to be burned.
- Persons at parish coffee hours and fellowship events may serve themselves food and beverages.
- At parish coffee hours and other fellowship and fund-raising activities, social distancing will continue to be maintained as noted in previous Diocesan directives and guidelines.

For Churches in the State of New Jersey:

- Persons who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are not required to wear masks in church, nor to be socially distanced. However, anyone wishing to wear a mask, and/or be socially distanced, may do so.
- For their own safety, and protection, unvaccinated persons should continue to wear masks and be socially distanced from other persons without masks.
- Persons 65 years and older, persons with medical conditions that increase their susceptibility to COVID-19, and particularly persons in these groups who are not fully vaccinated, should continue to exercise caution with respect to wearing masks at church and being socially distanced.
- In consonance with the civil directives of the State of New Jersey, the maximum indoor gathering limit is presently set at 50, and effective June 4, 2021, that maximum limit will be removed.
- Parishes can provide temple space for those who continue to wear masks and be socially distanced.
- The temple and other facilities used by the parish will continue to be sanitized at least once per week.
- On the condition that the temple is sanitized as required above, the kissing of the Cross, the Holy Icons, and other sacred objects of veneration may be resumed.
- With respect to the distribution of Holy Communion:
 - If the traditional practice of giving the Holy Mysteries with one spoon has been suspended, then the parish priest, at his discretion, may resume doing so. However, the parish priest, at his discretion, may continue to follow the previous Diocesan directives regarding the use of multiple spoons and the cleansing of the spoon or spoons between communicants.
 - If the traditional practice of using the common Communion cloth held under the Chalice for cleansing of communicants' lips has been suspended, then the parish priest, at his discretion, may resume doing so. The parish priest may announce to communicants that they have the option to use the common cloth, rather than individual tissues. However, the clergy may continue to offer communicants the option of bringing individual tissues to cleanse their lips, then placing the tissues in a dedicated container to be burned.
- Persons at parish coffee hours and fellowship events may serve themselves food and beverages.

Throughout the Diocese: The clergy and faithful are to respect the personal choices of their parish community members concerning the reception of the COVID-19 vaccine. Each adult and each parent must discern whether to receive or to have their children receive the COVID-19 vaccine, and whether to continue to wear a mask, vaccinated or not. As your father in Christ, I sincerely beg you to recognize that the “vaccinated” or “unvaccinated” status of any individual or group is not, and is not to become, a source of division, criticism, or indiscriminate discussion in the Church. The Church is a hospital, where health and healing are valued goals for everyone. Respect, love, and support are essential tools of Christian service in furthering those goals for every member of the parish family.

Any questions or concerns regarding these Directives should be conveyed to the Office of the Archbishop.

These Guidelines are issued with profound gratitude to God for His mercy and many blessings, and to all the faithful of our Diocese for their steadfast faithfulness during this unprecedented time of crisis. It is my sincere hope that the coming summer season will bring a great restoration of *communion* and *community*, which the evil one has sought to destroy during these past fourteen difficult months. As we look forward to the revival of summer barbecues, sports events, church camps, and family celebrations, may our hearts echo the triumphant Resurrectional cry still ringing forth in our beloved churches: ***“Christ is Risen!”***

With my humble prayers, archpastoral blessing and sincere love,

f Michael
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Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey