



April 7, 2020
04/002

To the Venerable Abbots and Abbesses and monastics of our communities,
To the President and Dean of our Seminaries,
To the clergy and faithful of the Archdiocese of Washington,
To the clergy and faithful of the Albanian Archdiocese,
To the clergy and faithful of the Diocese of New England,

May the blessing of the Lord be upon you all through his grace and love for mankind.

My beloved flock, I am grateful to God for your patience and perseverance during this difficult and unusual time of the coronavirus pandemic. This is a time of trial for all of us, but through prayer to God and love for our neighbor, we will come through it as stronger Christians increasingly devoted to our Lord and willing to make sacrifices for his sake.

Holy Synod Directives

The most recent directives of our Holy Synod were sent to you and posted on the website of the Orthodox Church in America on April 1, 2020. There were three (3) primary documents contained in that release:

- 1) **General Directives** adopted on March 30, 2020, which were substantively the same as our previous directives but extending them to the end of April.
- 2) **Liturgical Directives** adopted on March 30, 2020 which apply to all dioceses but were more specifically geared towards those dioceses that are offering limited services.
- 3) A **Legal Communiqué** jointly adopted by the Holy Synod (on March 30, 2020) and the Metropolitan Council (on March 31, 2020).

If you have not seen these, I would encourage you to consult the “Coronavirus Resources” page on the Orthodox Church in America website [here](#).

As noted in the above documents, each bishop has the authority and responsibility to issue additional directives that reflect the specific concerns and context of those institutions that are under his omophorion. After much prayerful reflection I have decided the new directives given below. Please be sure to read the further explanations that follow them.

My New Directives

On March 14, 2020, I issued my first set of directives which allowed for limited services. This was followed on March 17, 2020, with a second set of directives, effectively suspending all public liturgical services in the dioceses and institutions under my omophorion. **The following updated directives are effective immediately:**

- **All parishes and missions of the Archdiocese of Washington, the Albanian Archdiocese, and the Diocese of New England, and all seminary chapels are to maintain the suspension of all public liturgical services through April 30, 2020.**

- **All monastery chapels are closed to the public but are permitted to maintain the regular (or modified) cycle of services for the brotherhood and sisterhood alone, through April 30, 2020.**

- **For the period from Lazarus Saturday to Holy Pascha, I will, as your diocesan bishop, serve all the services at the Monastery of St Tikhon of Zadonsk and most of these services will be live-streamed. I will also offer a brief word to all of those who are participating at each opportunity that is available, within or at the conclusion of those services.**

- **I am permitting, but not requiring, my three diocesan cathedrals (St Nicholas in Washington, DC, Holy Trinity in Boston, and St George in South Boston) to offer the Divine Liturgy for Palm Sunday and Pascha only, with one priest and no more than 3 servers/singers who are in good health (for a total of four people in the Church), who have already gone above and beyond the quarantine measures stipulated by the civil and medical authorities, and are not in violation of any of the directives issued by the Holy Synod.**

- **No other public services are to be offered in any of our churches or missions (other than the monasteries). However, some or all of the following non-eucharistic offices may be celebrated by the clergy in their homes, with the participation of their families as applicable (and live-streamed as possible):**

- Bridegroom Matins on Sunday Evening (modified as necessary)
- Bridegroom Matins on Monday Evening (modified as necessary)
- Bridegroom Matins on Tuesday Evening (modified as necessary)
- Matins on Wednesday Evening (modified as necessary)
- The Reading of the 12 Passion Gospels on Thursday Evening (with or without the hymnography of Matins, depending on your capabilities and strength)
- The Royal Hours on Friday morning (modified as necessary)

- **I am willing to consider blessing other services non-eucharistic offices upon receipt of reasonable request.**

- **All other directives of the Holy Synod and the civil authorities must be strictly observed, including the restriction on the serving of the Divine Liturgy in the home.**

- **Concerning non-essential aspects of our celebrations (palm or willow branches, flowers, easter eggs, etc.): if these have been ordered or prepared already, they may be blessed by the priest but**

are not to be distributed in any manner. Depending on the object, they are to be either disposed of appropriately or placed in cool storage until they can be safely distributed after the crisis is concluded. Paschal baskets may be prepared in the home and blessed by the faithful themselves using holy water if they have some available.

• All efforts must be made to provide resources and tools for the faithful of all ages to have the opportunity to enter into the week of our Lord's passion and to experience His glorious resurrection even in these restricted circumstances. We are not canceling the resurrection. We are finding ways to experience it in different ways.

Rationale for the Above Directives

I understand full well that, upon reading these some may feel sadness about these new directives, for I have experienced that same sadness in preparing them. They are, however, the fruit of prayer and attentiveness to my own conscience with the responsibility I have been given as your father in Christ. To help you understand my decision to adopt these directives, I would like to share with you the fundamental principles that I relied on to make my decision:

- 1) These measures are part of our Christian responsibility to protect not only our brothers and sisters in the Church but also our neighbors and fellow human beings. They are part of our Christian responsibility to ease the burden of our overtaxed health-care infrastructure: not the buildings and equipment, but the brave men and women who are working under great pressure as doctors, nurses, first responders, law enforcement, nursing home staff, and a multitude of other service workers. Love requires that we assist them in any way we can.
- 2) The measures I am asking us to abide by should be seen as a sacrificial effort from every single one of us (bishops, clergy, monastics, and faithful) in keeping with the present season of repentance and ascetical striving. But even more importantly, they are an effort that is in keeping with the sacrificial love shown by our Lord Jesus Christ in his holy and life-giving passion and death on the Cross. Following these directives is a self-sacrificial offering to our Lord, additionally blessed, because it is not devised by one's own will, but a response of freely offered obedience.
- 3) The holy body and precious blood of our Lord can never be a source of disease, it is after all for the healing of soul and body, but the COVID-19 virus can still be passed through the congregation in the air that we breathe and on the church doorknob we touch. Out of love for our neighbor, we must do everything we can to protect the vulnerable by slowing the rate of infection not only in our parishes, but in the greater community, and thereby allowing the hospitals and medical community to more adequately care for those most at risk.
- 4) No priest or deacon should feel any guilt or anxiety about the canonical implications of not serving the Divine Services in their temples. No layperson should feel any guilt or anxiety about being absent from the divine services in their temples. We find ourselves in extraordinary circumstances that require an extraordinary response. But that extraordinary response does not entail any severing of our relationship to, and communion with, our Lord Jesus Christ.

- 5) While the offering of the mystical sacrifice and the partaking of the Holy Eucharist are the supreme expression of our communion with Christ, there are other ways that the Church provides to us for this communion. The example of St Mary of Egypt has been used extensively during this time, but she is by no means the only such example. Almost the entirety of the Patristic witness is devoted to the teaching of prayer, the purification of the heart, and to the Christian life. The Eucharist may be the crowning of all of these, but every other aspect of our Christian life has the potential to bring us into real communion with our Lord. Now, we have the opportunity and obligation to make use of this time to develop an inner life, which can assist us throughout the remaining time of our lives.
- 6) I acknowledge that the inability of the clergy to serve the Paschal services or of the faithful to taste of the banquet of immortality on the feast of feasts is a great sorrow for us. But we also know that, since these are temporary measures, we can look forward to a return to the altar for the clergy and a return to the reception of the holy gifts for all in due time. But now is the time to increase our longing for these through prayer, preparation, and patience, knowing that, regardless of what we can, or cannot, offer in our church temples, the Lord will indeed rise and we will be received into the joy of the feast.
- 7) The live-streaming of services has been a great blessing to a large number of us, clergy and faithful. I count myself among them as well. While not downplaying their importance, I would like for us to place an even greater emphasis on the development of our personal prayer. If we are deprived of the physical services, we ought to remember that our own physical prayer in our icon corners alone, or in our family's "little church," can be a tremendously uplifting and inspiring experience, one which will make us appreciate even more the blessing of the live-streaming of services and build up our anticipation for our return to the church temple and community, in due time.
- 8) These directives are emergency measures under life-threatening conditions. There are bishops, priests, deacons, monks, and laypeople that would not be sick and endangered now, if such measures were adopted earlier.
- 9) To the clergy that ask why I am not permitting the serving of services by the priest with a very limited number of participants (as other dioceses and jurisdictions are permitting), I would respond in the following manner: First, in light of realistic concerns relating to contagion and the possibility of persons being asymptotically contagious, it is not a risk that I am willing to take. Second, I am convinced that this time of social isolation calls for an extreme effort at solidarity with our brothers and sisters who will not have the opportunity to come to church. Many of them, such as our elderly who are in nursing homes, are already isolated enough. Third, I believe at this time that it is best for all the faithful to gather around their bishop as an act of further unity in the face of the fragmentation this virus is bringing.
- 10) Finally, I provide these difficult directives with the understanding that they are not a permanent change to our Orthodox Christian life, but rather a temporary means of preserving the lives of Orthodox Christians and our neighbor. Yes, we believe in miracles; yes, we trust in the sanctifying protection of the saints, and yes, we have experienced the healing provided by the sacrament of holy unction. None of these blessings is negated by the directives below. I would like the treasure and the blessings that we have within our Holy Orthodox Church to be

available for all of us, clergy and faithful, and not make the funeral service the focus of our liturgical life for the foreseeable future, which could be the case if the pandemic is not contained because of our own failure to act responsibly.

Final Exhortation

As a final exhortation, I offer the following words of encouragement:

To the Clergy: Some of you may feel crushed by the restrictions under which you are now asked to serve your flocks. I would exhort you not to give in to such thoughts but to remember that your priesthood or diaconate is not being taken away. Rather, you are being called by your bishop to a different kind of service that is in no way inferior to, and in no way different from, the blessing to represent your bishop by serving at the altar. This service is the laying down of your life for the sake of the sheep, that is, the sacrificial offering of yourselves so that Christ might increase in your parishioners by guiding them in their homes through Holy Week to Pascha.

To the faithful: In many ways, this Holy Week and Pascha will be different than any other we have experienced. But perhaps this will make it one of the most memorable experiences of this sacred season by forcing us to approach in ways that we are not used to. We may be disappointed that stability of what we have been used to in the past is not there for us this year, but there is also consolation in knowing that we have an opportunity to exercise some spiritual “muscles” that perhaps we have not used in a while.

Please know that I offer the above with much pain in my heart but also with deep trust in the integrity of my clergy, the dedication of my monastics, and the stability of my faithful. I have been impressed, moved, and inspired by the resilience and wisdom all of you have shown throughout this crisis and I am confident that I can rely on you as we continue to weather this storm. There is not storm or darkness that can overcome the light of the risen Word Who was in the beginning, Who was with God, Who was God, and will be so for all eternity.

With paternal love in Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by stylized initials.

+TIKHON
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada