



May 16, 2020
05/020

To the Very Reverend Abbots, Abbesses, and Very Reverend Clergy Leaders of the Stavropegial Institutions,

Christ is Risen!

I pray that all of you are staying healthy and maintaining the integrity of your communities as best as possible during these trying times.

As you know, on May 1, 2020 the Holy Synod of Bishops issued a Pastoral Letter and a set of New Directives to guide the Orthodox Church in America as whole in the gradual reopening of its parishes. The only directive specific to the stavropegial institutions was the recommendation for monasteries to refrain from their traditional ministry of hospitality. The seminaries have likewise been operating under their own protocols in terms of the administration and academic programs of their institutions.

With respect to my diocesan parishes, I have provided some guiding principles to be fulfilled and a questionnaire to be completed prior to my giving a blessing to gradually re-open each parish. Since the monasteries and seminaries are in a different category than a typical parish, I am proposing a modified approach to guide the stavropegial institutions as they contemplate the possibility of re-opening.

In the case of the monasteries, which have been blessed to continue their internal life with the brotherhood or sisterhood, a potential re-opening through the re-admittance of visitors or pilgrims may be something that is still far off. Nevertheless, I would ask that, before taking such a step, you present me with a written proposal containing the points outlined below.

In the case of the seminaries, which are coming to the conclusion of the academic year in any case, I would likewise ask that, before taking any steps to expand the liturgical life at the seminary, you a) review the Synodal Pastoral Letter and Synodal Directives of May 1, 2020, b) review the additional requirements attached to this letter and, c) provide me, at the appropriate time, with a written proposal containing the points outlined below.

- 1) An accurate report of the civil directives currently in place in your geographic location (State, county, municipality) with respect to the possibility of allowing gatherings of people (including numbers allowed, social distancing requirements).
- 2) The most recent statistics for your geographic area with respect to the number of COVID-19 cases, the number of deaths, and the direction of the curve of infections. Any movement towards re-opening should be predicated on a downward slope in number of infections, deaths, and hospitalizations.

Metropolitan Tikhon, Primate

- 3) A report on the general physical health of the members of your community, with special note of anyone in “at risk” categories including age and underlying health issues (as defined by the CDC and other health authorities).
- 4) A detailed plan for the maintenance of the cleanliness of any temples or other structures of your institution and measures for personal protection (masks, hand sanitizers, etc) that you will maintain.
- 5) A plan for the manner of the possible introduction of visitors/pilgrims in accordance with the allowed civil restrictions, including the possibility of rotating attendance.

I am not providing any more specific guidance at this point, since each of your institution will have unique circumstances, requiring different approaches. For this reason, I leave it to you, as leaders of your communities, to begin the process as you see fit, with the understanding that any eventual change in your current status will require my blessing.

To assist with this process, I am asking His Grace, Bishop Alexis, my auxiliary for stavropegial institutions, to serve as coordinator in this process. Please contact him with any questions or concerns, and forward to him any proposals for re-opening that you prepare, copying me and my Chancellor. His Grace has been caring for his parents during the last month but is returning to Saint Tikhon’s Monastery this weekend and should be available to assist starting next Monday, May 18.

As a final note, I should emphasize that there is no mandate to open at all or to expand your offering of liturgical services to the broader community. Each of you has the responsibility of maintaining the health and safety of your own community, as well as the wider community around you. Only you can properly discern when (or if) any steps need to be taken to re-open.

Thank you for your prayers and for your faithful service and understanding during these challenging times. I humbly ask for your prayers and your continued patience.

With love in our Risen Lord,



+ Tikhon,
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

Cc: His Grace, Bishop Alexis
Archpriest Alexander Rentel

Some requirements:

- 1) Sign-in Sheet – the date and type of service and a list of persons attending (including children) shall be provided and kept on file in the parish office each time your temple is opened for services. Each household shall provide a telephone number to facilitate contact tracing if necessary.
- 2) Those coming to church should take their temperature at home that day. Those with a temperature of 100.4 or above should not enter. If it is not possible for one to take one's temperature at home, using a no contact infrared thermometer, one should have his or her temperature taken at church before entering.
- 3) Those who are symptomatic or ill should not attend
- 4) Those who are compromised with regard to their health or elderly should be encouraged to stay home.
- 5) Choir – should you have more than one person sing the responses, those singing must maintain social distancing and stand wherever possible towards the front of the temple, closest to the iconostasis.
- 6) Collection plate – a plate for offerings shall not be passed, but one placed by the doors of the temple or candle stand.
- 7) Candles shall not be handled by worshippers. Instead, someone may light candles for those present in the temple and online to prevent contamination.
- 8) If it is discovered someone who is ill with the coronavirus has been in church, services may not be held in the temple for at least two weeks.
- 9) A sign shall be posted on the doors of the Temple stating one enters at one's own risk and only those persons who have the permission of the rector to be present may enter.