



E. No. 283
June 5, 2020

“Opening Up America Again” Guidelines for our Churches and Monasteries

Beloved Clergy, Monastics and Laity,

By now, all of you have received and had sufficient time to carefully review the Guidelines on the Opening up of America, as it pertains to your parish and monastery churches. Most of you have used the "toolkit", established by the Assembly of Canonical Bishops of the United States of America, in order to understand at which level you are legally permitted to open up your churches again for public worship. However, at all times adhering to the relevant Directives which have been issued.

At this time, due to the number of inquiries and other information received, as your Diocesan Bishop, canonically charged with the responsibility of overseeing the entirety of the Diocese, I must now ask all of you to **approach this matter cautiously and with full responsibility on your local level.** You must regularly consult with representatives of local government, medical professionals, and insurance agents to formulate as complete a picture as possible in order to properly guide the opening up of our parishes and monasteries.

PRACTICAL MEASURES IN MOVING FORWARD

At this point in time, for the sake of caution, no church is permitted to be fully reopen and return to normative practices and standards. Also, at present, it not wise to open social centers for coffee hours and the like. **All, with God’s help and in due time! Slowly, but surely!**

Therefore, in addition to adherence to applicable Directives as set out in Act E. No. 176 of March 13, 2020, let us all together – and without exception – apply the following measures regardless of where your parish church may be located:

1. Safe and appropriate distancing of 6 feet, between parishioners is to be maintained while in church, only families that live together may sit or stand together, every other row of pews is to be cordoned off, so that only every other pew can be occupied;
2. Wearing of masks or face scarves – where mandated, applies to all the faithful, save those who are serving, reading and chanting;
3. Altar servers who handle the naphora (antidoron) must wear face masks and gloves, even when distributing the bread at the time of Holy Communion, and the end of Liturgy;
4. At this time full choir participation is not allowed, only a few voices, with the choir director facing away, and not toward the singers, while maintaining the prescribed distance;

5. The collection plate is not to be passed, as previously noted, and as monetary notes have been designated as potential carriers of virus, face masks and gloves are to be worn by those who will collect and count donations; and
6. If anyone is ill, they must stay home. No exceptions.

Kindly understand that all of that which was brought forward, was done with full paternal love of a father toward his spiritual children. There are important lessons to be learned and accepted, and we are all duty bound in the Holy Spirit to understand and accept the same.

With Archpastoral blessings and love in the Holy Spirit,

Bishop of Eastern America
The Serbian Orthodox Church

