



Holy Protection of Mary Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Phoenix

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POLICY STATEMENT / 14 MAY 2020 of Holy Protection of Mary Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Phoenix

Re: Directives Regarding Parish Liturgical and Other Activities Relevant to the Corona Virus Pandemic

Since our last formal policy statement on this matter was issued on 18 March 2020, made effective through 30 April 2020, and with some interim advisories provided on Friday 8 May 2020, the civil directives regarding personal and collective health concerns in the United States have evolved, and continue to do so in local jurisdictions. Our eparchy's policy is therefore now updated, as follows:

1. The granting of a dispensation to the Faithful from the obligation to attend the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and Holy Days continues through Sunday 31 May 2020, however:
 - A. The celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and Holy Days is to take place, as stated in our previous policy statement, even if no one else is in attendance;
 - B. In accord with the particular state and local guidelines issued by the civil jurisdiction(s) in which the parish is located, celebrations of the Divine Liturgy may be attended by the faithful, provided there is strict compliance with such guidelines on the part of both clergy and lay participants;
 - C. The parish pastor, administrator, or rector is to insure, through provision of direction, *in writing*, to all participants, prior to the celebration of Liturgies, procedures which will be used for sterilization of sacred vessels and utensils, the need for use of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks and gloves (which the parish should provide if necessary), the procedure for receiving Holy Eucharist, seating requirements (e.g., if the celebration takes place in the church building) which will meet required social distancing protocols, spacing requirements between vehicles (if the faithful remain in their vehicles), and spacing requirements if the Liturgy is celebrated outdoors and the Faithful do not remain in their vehicles. This written information may be published in the parish bulletin, posted on the parish website, and/or made available through other social media the parish may use;
 - D. A policy is also to be developed and posted, compliant with state and local guidelines, for restroom and drinking fountain use, if these amenities are to be made available to those in attendance, which includes how and with what frequency these facilities will be sanitized;
 - E. The parish pastor, administrator, or rector is to keep apprised of changes that may occur in their state or local directives and modify their parish policies as necessary to maintain compliance with those current guidelines;
 - F. The parish pastor, administrator, or rector is to provide a copy of his written policy statement, as described above, to the Eparchy as soon as it is completed.

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2. The suspension of all other parish activities continues through at least 31 May 2020. These include, but may not be limited to: the assembling and conducting of Religious Education classes and/or adult education offerings, social gatherings, such as those held after the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Sundays, and any other events which may offer meals, education, socializing, or any combination of these activities.
3. Wedding, funeral, and baptismal liturgical celebrations may occur in compliance with state and local guidelines which in turn may set a maximum number of attendees. Individuals in higher risk groups, such as the elderly, the immune-compromised, or who may be at risk due to a pre-existing condition or conditions for contracting the corona virus are to be encouraged not to attend;
4. The celebration of the Sacrament of Penance may occur, provided adequate ventilation is available, a minimum distance of six (6) feet is maintained between the priest and penitent, and the priest wears a face mask.
5. The Faithful who are unable, for reasons of health or age, or due to their need or obligation to care properly for others, and so determine, for these reasons, not to attend the Divine Liturgy where it may be made available at this time, are to be strongly encouraged to listen respectfully and/or observe celebrations of the Divine Liturgy via live streaming services which some of our parishes offer, including the eparchial Cathedral of St. Stephen in Phoenix (10 am Sundays Arizona time). They are also to be encouraged to observe Sunday and Holy Days by setting aside time for prayer and/or Scripture study, particularly as a family unit activity if they are not living alone, or if they do not use or do not have access to media employed in the streaming process. Those whose work schedules do not allow for attendance or live streaming opportunities are similarly encouraged to engage, insofar as they are able, in prayer and/or Scripture study.
6. Where practical during the day, allow churches and chapels to remain open for private prayer with a posted advisory that proper social distancing is to be observed at all times;
7. Place a sign of adequate size on the front door of the parish church and/or chapel, and a corresponding notice in the weekly bulletin, notifying the Faithful of the following:
 - A. Bishop Olmsted has dispensed the Faithful from attending Divine Liturgy through 31 May 2020, subject to revision depending on how the pandemic situation develops;
 - B. The time(s), if any, and under what circumstances (in-building attendance, attendance by remaining in vehicles, etc.) the Divine Liturgy is to be offered;
 - C. The time(s), if any, that the parish will be streaming its liturgical celebrations, and/or other media outlets offering Byzantine Catholic liturgical and/or prayer programming, and how to access these events by also posting the related website through which they will be broadcast.

This policy will be amended/updated as circumstances and modification of civil guidelines warrant, but not later than 31 May 2020.

By continuing to cooperate with civil jurisdictions, I believe that we can provide the safest environment possible for those who are beginning, in many areas, to resume attendance at Sunday and Holy Day celebrations of the Divine Liturgy and, at the same time, take the opportunity to demonstrate well our efforts and desire to be responsible members of our local communities, by living, day to day, and observable by all, the faith we profess. This allows for an orderly renewal of our participation in parish and sacramental life, and perhaps an even greater appreciation for it. Such participation of the believing community is a profound and grace-filled encounter with the Christ, through Word and Sacrament, and a singularly strong witness to Him alone as Lord and God. It is irreplaceable, mysterious, wonderful, and life-giving. It is something that we cherish, need, and respect. It is the gift of a good and loving God Who, in love, wants us very near to Him.

With gratitude for your commitment to priestly, diaconal, and lay service, and our collective proclamation of the Gospel through it, I ask God's continuing guidance and blessings for you, and for all His children.

Sincerely in Christ,

Thomas J. Olmsted

Most Reverend Thomas J. Olmsted, D.D., J.C.D.

Apostolic Administrator, *Sede Plena*, of Holy Protection of Mary Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Phoenix

