



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

May 19, 2020

To the
Devout Orthodox Christians of the Parish Communities of the
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

Χριστός Ανέστη! Christ is Risen!

I pray this letter finds you all well and in good health as our Holy Orthodox Church, our Metropolis, our Ecclesiastical Communities, and our nation continue to confront the challenging effects of COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

The past couple months have been particularly challenging for all people as the devastating effects of the Coronavirus have permeated all facets of society. Nevertheless, there have been noticeable improvements to the present situation which has made it possible for some states and communities to recommence in-person gatherings, albeit, in a limited capacity. As such, the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey has been developing a Parish Reopening Strategy so that Parishes and parishioners alike may adequately prepare once the Parishes are permitted to once again open their doors to the devout faithful. A critical element of this strategy centers around the parishioners of each community complying with a series of requirements which conform to State and Local regulations, CDC guidance, and additional Metropolis of New Jersey directives/requirements. A list of these requirements are as follows:

- Parishioners must register their attendance with their full names and contact information. Your Parish Priest will notify you of the registration process and platform which the Parish will use.
- Parishioners must screen themselves prior to coming to church including a temperature check even if they have not experienced any symptoms of COVID-19. If they have any symptoms, they are not to attend Church.
- Parishioners shall not come to the Church by a ride share (Uber, Lyft), taxi, or by means of public transportation. It is strongly recommended that Parishioners arrive in their own vehicle or arrange for another parishioner to transport them.

- Parishioners must sanitize their hands upon entering the Church.
- Parishioners must wear protective masks throughout the Services.
- Parishioners must adhere to the social distancing guidelines of keeping a six foot distance from other parishioners at all times in the pews and throughout the Church. The only exception being for families that have quarantined together, as they will be able to sit together in a designated section of the Church.
- Parishioners are not to wander in the Church, in the Parish facilities, or outside on the parish grounds.
- Small children shall not be allowed to roam the aisles.
- Only one parishioner will be allowed in the restroom at a time. Parishioners must thoroughly wash their hands after using the restroom.
- Parishioners must leave the Church premises, including the parking lot and exterior grounds, upon conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, all the while maintaining social distancing standards.
- If after attending any service a parishioner experiences symptoms of or tests positive for COVID-19, in addition to immediately contacting their medical provider, they must contact the Church office to inform the parish of the date that they attended service.

These measures will help to ensure that all of our Clergy and devout faithful remain as safe as possible during these turbulent times as we start to reopen our Ecclesiastical Communities for the Divine Services. It is my sincerest prayer that as we move forward, we do so safely and with thoughtfulness for our own health and for the health and safety of those around us. Praying that our loving Lord, who is the Physician of our souls and bodies, continues to guard and guide each of you and your families, I remain,

With Paternal Love and Blessings in the Risen Lord,



The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The word "Metropolitan" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and "Evangelos" follows in a similar but slightly smaller script. The signature is centered on the page.

† E V A N G E L O S
Metropolitan of New Jersey



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REOPENING OUR PARISHES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

In light of the recent events regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey has endeavored to take active steps in order to prepare our parishes for the Three Phase Parish Reopening Strategy that has been developed in order to ensure the safety of our beloved Clergy and Faithful.

This strategy has been developed in accordance with all State and Local regulations, CDC guidance, as well as additional Metropolis of New Jersey requirements.



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REOPENING OUR PARISHES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

- The attached list of CDC and State Health Department websites and guidance materials for the five states of the Metropolis of New Jersey are incorporated herein and made a part of these GOMNJ Reopening Guidelines.
- Except where these GOMNJ Reopening Guidelines are more restrictive, each Parish must also follow the orders and directives of their State, County, and Local Authorities. Where the GOMNJ Reopening Guidelines are more restrictive, such as the number of parishioners permitted in the Church or otherwise, each Parish must follow the more restrictive guidelines contained herein.



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THREE PHASE REOPENING PROCESS

PHASE I

The Liturgy will be celebrated with 10% less capacity than allowed by the local and state authorities.

*In the event there is a conflict between the State, County, or Local Authorities as to operating Capacity of a parish, the more restrictive requirement must be used in calculating participation

PHASE II

The Liturgy will be celebrated according to the capacity limitations issued by the local and state authorities.

*In the event there is a conflict between the State, County, or Local Authorities as to operating Capacity of a parish, the more restrictive requirement must be used in calculating participation.

PHASE III

Once all local and state capacity limitations are lifted, the Liturgy will once again be celebrated at full capacity, open to ALL Parishioners.



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THREE PHASE REOPENING PROCESS

- In order for a parish to transition from its current status of celebrating the Divine Liturgy behind closed doors to entering Phase 1 of the Reopening Process the parish must receive written permission from H.E. Metropolitan Evangelos.
 - Once a parish has received permission to enter Phase 1, that parish may only transition to the next Phase in the Reopening Process with the written permission or directive from His Eminence.
 - Any changes in a Parish's State, County, or Local COVID-19 reopening requirements must be immediately reported to the Metropolis.
- Prior to receiving permission from His Eminence for a parish to enter Phase 1 of the Reopening Process the parish must first meet all of the following requirements



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PART I: PARISH REQUIREMENTS

- Each parish must review, update, and implement an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). This must be done in collaboration with the local health departments and other relevant partners. The following CDC resource provides guidance as to what to include in your EOP: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019>
- There will be only one door available for entrance into the Church. This door will be kept open so that parishioners do not need to touch the door handle.
- There will be no access for parishioners to enter other buildings or areas, other than where the Liturgy is being celebrated, except for use of the restroom.
- Hand sanitizer stations must be available in the Narthex, in the restrooms and throughout the Church and/or Community Center.
- All Divine Liturgy books/Hymnals and parish publications (bulletins) must be removed from the pews.



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PART I: PARISH REQUIREMENTS

- There must be clearly marked seating designated throughout the church, that will direct and ensure that parishioners follow proper social distancing, remaining at least 6 feet apart. Every other pew is to remain empty.
 - The 6 foot social distancing does not apply to family members who have been quarantined together. These family members may sit together in the designated family sections of the Church.
- Although the CDC recommends restrooms to be closed, the restrooms are allowed to remain open for use by one parishioner at time.
- In addition, since it is a point of contact the Narthex must be continually sanitized.
- At the conclusion of every Service the entire Church must be properly sanitized according to the CDC, state, and local guidelines.

[CDC Sanitation Guidelines](#)



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PART I: PARISH REQUIREMENTS

- There must be clearly marked signage directing the faithful to follow the established social distancing/safety procedures in place.
- For the time being, the celebration of the Divine Liturgy shall continue to be livestreamed for the parishioners (due to capacity limits) who are unable to attend the service.
- Prior to entry into the Church parishioners are to be asked if they have been in contact with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19, or if they are taking care of anyone with COVID-19 symptoms. If they respond yes, then they will not be allowed to enter the Church.
- There are to be no gatherings of any kind after the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy.
- All Parish Council Members and Ushers must wear a mask at all times.
- Collection baskets are not to be passed. At the end of Liturgy a basket is to be placed in the Narthex and parishioners are to be encouraged to leave their donation as they exit.



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PART I: PARISH REQUIREMENTS

- It is the responsibility of the parish to keep and maintain a log book at the entrance of the Narthex in which the Parishioners will write the full name, full mailing address, phone number, and email address (if applicable) of each Parishioner and individual (including Clergy/Chanter/Sexton and Altar Servers) present or otherwise in attendance in the Church. This log must include the date and time of the service being attended.
 - A designated Parish Council Member logs each parishioner in as they enter the church using a Laptop or Tablet.
 - Or each person or family entering may prepare this information at home and upon arrival, placing in a basket found in the Narthex.
 - Or using pens that are constantly sanitized by a Parish Council Member the parishioners log themselves in.
 - Or a Parish Council Member has a record of all registered participants and checks people off as they come in.
- In order to alleviate congestion in the Narthex, the parish may set up the Pangari outside of the Church.



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PART 2: PARISHIONER SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

- Parishioners must wear protective masks throughout the Service.
- Parishioners must sanitize their hands upon entering the Church.
- Parishioners upon entry must register their attendance with their full names and contact information.
- Parishioners must adhere to the social distancing guidelines of keeping a 6 foot distance from other parishioners at all times in the pews and throughout the Church. The only exception being for families that have quarantined together, as they will be able to sit together in a designated section of the Church.
- Parishioners must screen themselves prior to coming to church including a temperature check even if they have not experienced any symptoms of COVID-19. If they have any symptoms they are not to attend Church.



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PART 2: PARISHIONER SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

- Parishioners are not to wander in the Church, in the Parish facilities, or outside on the parish grounds.
- Parents are asked to keep their children from roaming the aisles.
- Parishioners shall not come to the Church by a ride share (Uber, Lyft), a taxi, or other means of public transportation. Parishioners must arrive in their own vehicle. **(Strongly Recommended), or arrange for another parishioner to transport them.**
- Parishioners must leave the Church premises, including the parking lot and exterior grounds, upon conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, all the while maintaining social distancing standards.



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PART 2: PARISHIONER SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

- Only one parishioner will be allowed in the restroom at a time. Parishioners must thoroughly wash their hands after using the restroom.
- If after attending any service, a parishioner experiences symptoms of or tests positive for COVID-19, in addition to immediately contacting their medical provider, they must contact the Church office to inform the parish of the date that they attended service.



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PART 3: PARISHIONERS ATTENDING THE DIVINE LITURGY

- Due to the limited capacity a registration platform is to be used by the parish in order for Parishioners to reserve their attendance at the Divine Liturgy on a first come first serve basis.
 - The Platform used must be able to collect full name, full mailing address, phone number, and email address (if applicable) of each Parishioner. This list must be printed out by 5pm the day before the Service.
 - A small portion of available capacity is to be reserved in order to offer Parishioners without internet access the ability to reserve via telephone.
 - Pertaining to 40 Day Memorial Services, priority is to be given for a family to register up to 10 people per Memorial Service.
 - All parishioners are to be given the opportunity to attend the Divine Liturgy before anyone can sign up to attend a 2nd Liturgy.
 - Any parishioners that reserve their place for a service and do not attend the Liturgy will have to wait for all other parishioners to have the opportunity to register before they may register again.



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PART 3: PARISHIONERS ATTENDING THE DIVINE LITURGY

- In order to give more Parishioners the opportunity to attend the Divine Liturgy, the parishes may offer the Divine Liturgy multiple times throughout the week, including evening Divine Liturgies.
 - The Parish priest should send out a survey to the faithful in order to gauge their interest in attending these additional Liturgies.
- The Liturgical schedule will not be the same for every parish and will be determined by the Parish priest based on the needs of the parish.
 - There must be an adequate number of Parish Council Members at every Service to ensure all requirements are adhered to.



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PART 4: LITURGICAL GUIDELINES FOR REOPENING

- The Liturgy may be celebrated in the parish gymnasium/Community Center if it provides for a larger capacity than the Church.
 - In addition, a parish may celebrate the Liturgy in the Church and livestream the Service to the gym/hall, thus allowing more people to attend the Liturgy.
- Altar servers (Acolytes) are to be limited to 2 per service.
- Until further notice there will be no Choirs.
- The traditional practice of receiving Holy Communion will not be changed.



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PART 4: LITURGICAL GUIDELINES FOR REOPENING

- Andidoron is to be cut by one person, wearing gloves and a mask, placed in a plastic bag, and each parishioner will carefully take their own piece from the basket, without touching the remaining. The same process is to be used for the distribution of Kollyva.
- The celebration of the Holy Sacraments of Baptism and Marriage are not permitted to take place until further notice.
- 40 Day Baby Blessings are to be scheduled during the week with only the parents present.
- Throughout the Service Parish Council members are to continually monitor and remind the parishioners of the 6 foot social distancing guidelines.



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PART 5: STEPS FOR REOPENING

- An organizational meeting between the Parish Priest and the members of the Parish Council must be held in order to properly prepare for the parish reopening.
- The Parish Priest and Parish Council President must complete a checklist of Metropolis Requirements for reopening, as well as submit in writing a letter to His Eminence which includes:
 - Certification that the parish has made all appropriate preparations for safely reopening.
 - A request to His Eminence for permission for the parish to begin reopening to the faithful according to Phase 1 of the Metropolis Three Phase Reopening Strategy.
- The Priest and Parish Council must correspond with their parishioners explaining to them the Reopening and all of the safeguards and social distancing requirements that have been put in place prior to the parish reopening.



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PART 5: STEPS FOR REOPENING

- Once approved by His Eminence for the parish to reopen, the parish Priest must submit a full report by email to His Eminence upon the completion of each service, including a list of all Parish Council Members present.
- Please be aware that once reopened it is the responsibility of the Parish Priest and Parish Council to ensure that all of these requirements are being met at all times. If the parish is not meeting these requirements, it is the prerogative of His Eminence to immediately rescind his blessing and permission for the parish to reopen to the faithful.

COVID-19 REOPENING GUIDANCE FOR COMMUNITY AND FAITH ORGANIZATIONS:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) Website and specific guidance:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>

CDC Checklist for Community and Faith Leaders

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/checklist.html>

CDC Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

New Jersey Covid-19 Closures

<https://covid19.nj.gov/faqs/nj-information/general-public/what-businesses-are-closed-what-is-considered-essential>

Pennsylvania Covid-19 Resources for Businesses, Communities, and Local Governments

(as of 5/18/20, gatherings of more than 25 are prohibited, including business/church meetings or events)

<https://dced.pa.gov/resources/>

<https://www.governor.pa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/20200504-COVID-19-Business-Guidance.pdf>

<https://www.health.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

Delaware Covid-19 resources and phased reopening

<https://coronavirus.delaware.gov/>

<https://governor.delaware.gov/delawares-recovery/>

Maryland Covid-19 resources and phased reopening

<https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/pages/community-resources>

Virginia Covid-19 resources and phased reopening.

https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2020/04/Faith-PDF_Guidance-Documents_JBU_4-6-2020.pdf

EEOC pandemic workplace guidance:

<https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/pandemic-preparedness-workplace-and-americans-disabilities-act>