

DIocese OF NEW ENGLAND – ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA



The Most Blessed TIKHON

*Archbishop on Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada
Locum Tenens of The Diocese of New England*

Archpriest John Kreta

Chancellor

November 21, 2020

Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers of the Diocese of New England,

I greet you all with the blessings of the sacred feast of the Entrance of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple and pray that you are all well in soul and body.

Let us give glory to God for the inspiring efforts of doctors, scientists, healthcare workers, and essential workers who have labored greatly in these past months in treating COVID-19 patients and in developing treatments for COVID-19.

Yet despite the progress that has been made medically and scientifically in combating the virus, we still must seriously consider the significant nationwide increase in COVID-19 cases in recent days. Due to this increase, which has been particularly notable in certain areas of New England, I am urging the Parishes under my archpastoral care to do the following:

First, in my October letter of October 21st, I stated *“I now strongly encourage you to discuss with your parish councils the current status of your opening plans and the changing COVID environment around you. For example, if you are now in a “Red Zone” you may want to consider closing your parish until your area improves. At the very least, (and this should be for those in “orange zones” as well), you should consider going down a stage or two of your current plans and lower the limit of attendees at Liturgy”*. I still maintain this principle while still encouraging our Parishes to maintain the celebration of the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings and on Great Feasts of the Church. It is absolutely vital that we continue to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in this time of need, remembering and giving witness to Our Lord’s victory over sin and death. That being said, parishes need to protect the safety of their faithful if they decide to continue to gather (whether full capacity as allowed by civil authorities, or with smaller numbers, or even with just the priest and cantors) for the Divine Liturgy. Therefore we all must continue to ensure that appropriate health safety protocols are in place, such as we have become accustomed to—the use of protective face masks worn properly, strict and constant social distancing, hand sanitization, health screening, and the limiting of attendance to make sure that social distance can be maintained at all times. Singing should be limited to a small group, perhaps, even, to a single

cantor. Clergy, singers, cantors and readers, provided that they are at a significant distance from others, might perform certain parts of the service unmasked. Otherwise, they, too, ought to wear the now customary protective masks.

Second, I am asking our Parishes to ensure that the Faithful in need of such are provided with access to the Church's ministry, and, in particular to the Sacraments of the Church, especially the Sacrament of Confession, and, also, to the saving Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation. Also, troubled people should be given access to pastoral counseling. This counseling may take place via phone or video teleconference, but, in some cases, in-person meetings with an individual or small family group may be in order, if the need is great. Connections can be made in-person, even when wearing masks and maintaining social distance, that are not possible otherwise, and these connections can have great pastoral power.

Third, I am now directing that all parishes in red zones (or equivalent) as defined by the state, limit in-person activities in our Church buildings and other Church facilities *strictly* to just those activities that fulfill the first two points that I have made above. This means that, if your parish is in a red zone, all other activities—such as administrative meetings, educational classes, fellowship gatherings, catechetical sessions, etc.—may *not* take place in-person at this time, but rather by other means, such as present technology makes available to us. Also, non-sacramental worship services, such as Matins, Vespers, Compline, the Canonical Hours, Akathists, Molebens, etc., need to be accomplished via video-teleconference (“Zoom,” “Go To Meeting,” etc.) at this time, so as to further limit in-person contacts.

All the above is informed by two basic principles, each considered in view of the other: First, the life of the Church must go on, in its most vital and central aspects. Second, the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19 is most easily and most often transmitted when a person who is infected is in close proximity with another person, because they are likely breathing in each other's exhaled breath.

Balancing these two principles is what leads me to make the three points that I am making in this letter: First, we must maintain the Eucharistic Life of the Church. Second, we must maintain the Sacramental Life of the Church. Third, we must limit in-person activities to those that are truly necessary, because in-person activities are certainly the setting in which SARS-CoV-2 is most often transmitted.

With paternal love and prayers,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tikhon', with a cross symbol to the left.

+TIKHON

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