



THE DIOCESE OF THE SOUTH

Orthodox Church in America

P.O. Box 191109
Dallas, TX 75219

August 11, 2020

Dormition Fast/Afterfeast of the Transfiguration

Dear Reverend Fathers and Mothers,

All the blessings of the present feast and the ongoing fast!

We continue in this strange season in the life of our church, and of our nation as a whole. Vladyka Alexander, in his meetings with the clergy and monastics of the diocese, has counselled ὑπομονή: patience, perseverance, and endurance. The Apostle Paul admonishes us with much the same word: “But in all approving [yourselves] as the ministers of God, in much **patience** [ὑπομονῆ] in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses...” (2 Corinthians 6:4). May the Lord give us all such patience, knowing that, weary in well-doing as we are, we are doing good work.

We have not experienced the straight-line toward full reopening that we all hoped for several months back, and we may yet experience outbreaks which will confirm the ongoing restrictions. So, the various decrees of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America (from May 1, 2020) still remain in effect. On the whole, however, we are striving to simplify our guidelines in concert (dare I say “in symphonia”) with the civil directives, in accord with the preponderance of the evidence (which while clearer is still uncertain) concerning the spread of the coronavirus, encouraging a maximal approach to continued re-opening (within the bounds of the guidelines and directives), and using a good measure of wisdom and prudence, allowing local conditions, both parochial and civil, to guide further opening.

With regard to “wisdom and prudence”, the Lord Himself reminds us: “Wisdom is justified by her deeds” (Matthew 11:19). From the beginning of the pandemic we have strived both to protect the vulnerable in our communities and, looking beyond our own communities, to show love to our neighbor(s). It seems clear that the guidelines in place have thus far accomplished the former. **We will continue to emphasize this aspect.** As pastors and heads of monasteries we remain responsible for protecting the vulnerable in our flocks, at least as regards the life of the church. However, we are in a place where it seems our ability to affect the latter in any significant way is in question. Americans have shown themselves singularly unable to agree on a unified approach to containing this pandemic. Still, through advances in treatment, “social” distancing (where practiced), masking, and the like, we have shown that the hospitals are not being overwhelmed, and the mortality rate of those with COVID-19 seems to be falling overall. Therefore, we will continue forward with a simpler approach towards re-opening in line with Vladyka Alexander’s ongoing concern and care for the well-being of his flock, and still reflecting his concern for the greater community.

Please find appended below **Updated Directives and Guidelines** which were approved during a meeting today by Archbishop Alexander in consultation with the Deans, Chancellor, and Administrator. If you have any particular questions not covered by these updated guidelines, always reach out to your Dean and/or the Chancellor or Administrator for clarity.

I wish you all patient endurance for the days ahead.

In Christ, and with the fast,

Archpriest Marcus C Burch
Chancellor of the Diocese of the South

**Updated Directives and Guidelines on Continued Reopening
of Parishes, Missions, and Monasteries in the Diocese of the South**

August 11, 2020

The following applies to all Divine Services and Sacraments. In its parishes, missions, and monasteries the Diocese of the South shall

1. Continue to require face coverings (“masks”) at all times while inside – there is a consensus that this is helpful – we are not experts, and so we follow the consensus of the experts.
2. Require physical distancing during services – 6 feet between each individual or “family unit”. Choirs should be particularly attentive to this requirement. Outdoor services are fine, for now, as is “livestreaming” to an adjacent parish hall. Maximize the use of your space within the recommended guidelines. Airflow is important: open doors where applicable and practical.
3. Continue cleansing the spoon for the sake “of the weaker brother”. When there is a marked and consistent downward trend in the diocese, we will return to the normal distribution of the eucharist.
4. Resume kissing of icons, the cross, etc. Once again, the consensus is that this is primarily an airborne particulate transmitted virus. Of course, one may continue to venerate with the sign of the cross and bows.
5. Be creative with fellowship while still employing precautions – avoid enclosed spaces (take your coffee fellowship outside – thank God that autumn is approaching).
6. Permit indoor gatherings or classes of 15 or less so long as physical distancing is observed, face coverings are worn, and the duration is limited to less than one hour.
7. Encourage its clergy to visit parishioners in outdoor settings, and visit the vulnerable infirm inside with face coverings and distancing. Visits to hospitals and nursing homes are permitted where allowed. No further restrictions for medical personnel, so long as they are following their professional precautions.
8. Be cautious and charitable, and use common sense. In all things follow the spirit of what we are trying to accomplish.

Particularly related to Monasteries (and applicable to Deanery and Diocesan meetings)

1. At the discretion of the Abbot or Abbess, visitors to the monasteries may be permitted so long as face coverings are used and physical distancing is observed.
2. Individual visitors (or, for example, a married couple) may be accommodated overnight as long as they have private accommodations, wear face coverings in common spaces, and distance at all times.
3. No groups or retreats should be accommodated unless a specific plan for following the usual precautions is presented to the Archbishop, Administrator, and Chancellor (and Dean, where applicable).

These simplified Directives and Guidelines will remain in place until there is a clear end to the pandemic. Any variation will need to be approved by Archbishop Alexander in consultation with your Dean, the Chancellor, and the Administrator.

