



Reuniting Our People With Their Parish Homes

May 20, 2020

Since March 14, 2020, the Metropolis of Chicago responded to the threat of the novel coronavirus by issuing directives meant to help our community support public health efforts, protect our neighbors, and remain faithful to our Church's traditions and teachings. Parishes across our six-state Metropolis have made significant adjustments to their fellowship experiences, pastoral care, and liturgical practices. Our people have made significant sacrifices; they have set aside personal need as an act of love of neighbor. Each of us, in a unique way, has contributed to the global effort against COVID-19. The fight, however, is not over, and we must remain vigilant in thought and behavior.

A comprehensive scientific approach, along with socially responsible behavior, will continue in helping guide our progress. However, this is not enough. According to Saint Basil the Great, we must show equal care for our souls as that offered to our bodies. This means that efforts to promote spiritual health must occur simultaneously with praiseworthy efforts to protect physical health.

The Metropolis of Chicago has been working diligently on a comprehensive set of directives and measures to help bring greater equilibrium to the care shown to body and soul. These guidelines are informed by modern science; however, they are also imbued with Orthodox theology—*the queen of sciences*. The directives found in, *Reuniting Our People With Their Parish Homes*, are meant to help our communities provide conditions for individual safety while remaining true to their Christian beliefs and identity. Though external rubrics may shift slightly during these times, our experience of God's love remains the same.

The directives introduce overarching *conditions* that must be met across the entire six-state Metropolis; however, they also allow for variation based on the local parish reality, which is largely shaped by municipal, state, and federal laws and orders. Therefore, parishes in states with less stringent orders will include higher numbers of faithful in divine services than those parishes who must abide by more stringent governmental requirements. The Metropolis will work with the parishes and the clergy to identify means to offset such disparities across state lines.

Lastly, while we pray that the pandemic comes to an end as soon as possible, we must keep in mind that the public health effort remains fluid. This means that the Metropolis and our parishes may reintroduce more restrictive practices in the future.

Reuniting Our People With Their Parish Homes

Section A

Level of Attendance: Ultimately, local conditions of each parish will determine how and when parishioners can return to their parish homes. In addition to measures required by the Metropolis, each parish is required to abide by the directives and regulations of local authorities. At each level, practices of social distancing must be observed.

Phase	Required Conditions
Level One (Red)	No more than 5 people, including priest and other support staff. Online/Virtual services permitted.
Level Two (Orange)	No more than 10 people, including priest and other support staff. ¹ Online/Virtual services are encouraged to continue. The Metropolis will authorize a parish to enter Level Two once it has: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Certified in writing that it has met the requirements of the “Level Two - Parish Preparedness Checklist.” b. Submitted to the Metropolis in writing the names and contact information of the members of its Parish COVID-19 Safety Committee. c. Submitted in writing to the Metropolis with the manner in which it will identify and notify parishioners when it is their turn to attend services.
Level Three (Yellow)	Maximum number of people based on local directives and regulations. The directives and regulations among the 6 states of our Metropolis, and in some instances the regions within a state, will vary and will likely fluctuate as authorities adapt to local conditions. The Metropolis will authorize a parish to enter Level Three once it has: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Certified in writing that it has implemented all requirements of the “Level Three - Parish Preparedness Checklist.” b. Successfully implemented the protocols in Level Two for at <i>least three divine services</i>.
Level Four (Green)	Return to Pre-COVID numbers. The Metropolis will monitor the national and regional progress to control COVID-19 and will, in the future, provide the parishes with directives on how to resume pre-COVID operations.

¹ In an effort to best adhere to social distancing measures, all acolytes must be at least 16 years of age.

Section B

Activities Permitted on our Church Campuses: With the exception of humanitarian aid distribution, currently, *all non-liturgical activities must be conducted virtually*. Whether the parish is offering online/virtual services, the priest and/or other members of the parish leadership may continue to visit the parish campus to check on the integrity of the facilities. In Level One or Level Two, outside groups are not permitted use of parish facilities. If the parish has a rental agreement with an individual or an organization, it must seek advice from parish legal counsel. See **Section E** for care and cleaning of facilities.

Once authorized by the Metropolis to enter Level Three, a parish **must submit** a request to the Metropolis to resume certain non-liturgical activities on their campus. All liturgical and non-liturgical activities in Level Three must comply with the regulations of local authorities, including the use of personal protective equipment (“PPE”), crowd limitations, and social distancing.

Section C

Humanitarian Aid Programs: In the event that a parish has a program to distribute humanitarian aid to those in need that requires the use of their campus, such aid may only be distributed outdoors. Parishes must maintain the limits of staff/volunteers during these activities based on the limitations of local authorities. Staff and volunteers responsible for overseeing such programs must follow the safety measures as outline by the CDC: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/non-covid-19-client-interaction.html#](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/non-covid-19-client-interaction.html#)

Section D

Services Celebrated at our Churches: The Holy Eucharist is currently the only Sacrament regularly celebrated in the Metropolis. As certain *conditions* are met, additional sacraments will be permitted. At all services, compliance is required with all regulations of local authorities, including the use of PPE, crowd limitations, and social distancing.

1. **The Divine Liturgy:** The Divine Liturgy is being celebrated and may continue to be celebrated.
2. **Funerals:** Funerals may be celebrated in our parishes if local authorities permit. Currently, there can be no more than 10 people in attendance; however, once a parish is authorized by the Metropolis to enter Level Three, it may allow mourners to attend funerals at levels permitted by local authorities.
3. **Sacraments of Marriage:** The Sacrament of Marriage is not currently being celebrated in the Metropolis of Chicago. Since it is uncertain when weddings will be permitted again, the clergy are requested to work with couples to schedule alternate future dates for their weddings. When considering dates for weddings, the priest and couple need to consider whether a civil license may be obtained at that time. The original date for the wedding may remain on the parish calendar in the event that weddings are permitted by that time. Very soon, special rubrics for the Sacrament of Marriage will be prepared, allowing for the reintroduction of this sacrament of holy matrimony into the life of the parish.
4. **Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation:** The Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation *may* only be celebrated, with *permission of the Metropolis*, in those rare occasions where

the loss of life is imminent for the person seeking to be baptized or chrismated. Baptism and Chrismation under other circumstances are not permitted, until further notice. Since it is uncertain when Baptisms and Chrismations will be permitted again, the clergy are requested to work with families to schedule alternate future dates for the sacrament. The original date for the baptism/chrismation may remain on the parish calendar in the event that such sacraments are permitted by that time. Very soon, special rubrics for the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation will be prepared, allowing for the reintroduction of the sacraments of initiation and reception into the life of the parish.

5. **Sacrament of Holy Unction:** The Sacrament of Holy Unction may not be celebrated in the Church at this time. As part of his pastoral work, the priest may visit a parishioner who is not feeling well and anoint him/her with Unction. Very soon, special rubrics for administering Holy Unction will be prepared, allowing for the reintroduction of this sacrament of healing into the life of the parish.
6. **Sacrament of Confession:** As decided by the Holy Eparchial Synod, the Sacrament of Confession may not be celebrated by phone or through any other form of technology. An exception may be made, with permission of the Metropolis, in the event that a parishioner is hospitalized for COVID-19 (or loss of life is imminent) and is otherwise unable to receive a pastoral visit by a priest. Very soon, special rubrics for administering the Sacrament of Confession will be prepared, allowing for the reintroduction of this sacrament of reconciliation in the life of the parish.
7. **Personal Prayer in Church:** Opening the Churches for personal prayer is currently not permitted. As the parishes enhance their local support base and become more accustomed to special cleaning protocols, and as parishioners become more accustomed to the use of PPE and following social distancing measures, the Metropolis will make special provisions for allowing the churches to open their doors on a limited basis for personal prayer.
8. **Other Services (e.g. Paraklesis, Vespers, Orthros):** Clergy may continue to celebrate other services in their churches. Based on the level of attendance of the parish, and local directives and regulations, the faithful may be invited to attend those services.

Section E

Liturgical Rubrics: Clergy must follow the special rubrics for services and sacraments as provided by the Metropolis.

Section F

Care of and Cleaning of Parish Facilities: CDC guidelines for cleaning facilities must strictly be followed. The parish must follow a cleaning protocol of the church facilities, including restrooms and other accessible spaces, after the celebration of every service or after an individual or group enters the church (this is especially important when private prayer eventually becomes permitted). As parish employees eventually resume to work from their offices, those spaces must be thoroughly cleansed after every use. Unused spaces (gymnasiums, fellowship halls, and classrooms, etc.) should be off limits to parishioners and those visiting the parish. **The CDC Cleaning Guidelines:**

[cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/Reopening_America_Guidance.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/pdf/Reopening_America_Guidance.pdf)

Section G

Health & Social Distancing Measures: Irrespective of the level of participation of the faithful, every parish must abide by the CDC’s social distancing standards and any other safety directives of the Metropolis of Chicago. **The CDC Social Distancing Guidelines:** [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html)

Section H

Determining Which Parishioners May Attend Services: At all times, parishes must abide by the maximum number of people that may attend any service as defined by the Metropolis and the directives and regulations of local authorities. Every parish must develop the method for determining which parishioners are offered the opportunity to attend services. **Under no circumstance** may a parish implement a “first-come, first-serve” policy that requires parishioners to stand outside their church to secure a seat prior to the service.

Parishes **MAY NOT** introduce a “rotation” or “waiting” system in an effort to maximize the total number of people attending a service or receiving the Holy Eucharist. For example, if the maximum number of people who can attend a service in a parish is 10, this means that the maximum people in attendance for the service, including the priest, chanter, sexton, support staff and parishioners must not exceed 10 people for that service. Others, waiting in line outside, in their cars, etc. to enter once the original 10 depart or in the event that one the original 10 does not show up is strictly prohibited.

Parishes must take steps to protect those at greatest risk. In addition to informing people who display symptoms of COVID-19 or who are otherwise not feeling well for any reason, parishes should intentionally remind the vulnerable population of the need to stay home, as recommended by the CDC: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html). Until the CDC changes its guidelines, in an effort to protect the most vulnerable members of our communities, the parishes **must not** include members of the high-risk population in their attendance system. As part of their pastoral responsibilities, clergy, ensuring he is following safety measures, may visit such individuals at their homes to offer them the Holy Eucharist.

Section I

Marking Seats & Recording Attendance

In an effort to help with ushering people to their seats, as well as making the cleaning process more effective and efficient, each parish must mark seating locations for every service. Parishes must keep a record of the date of the service and names of the faithful who attend each service.

Section J

Use of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment): Everyone who enters a church building must wear a facemask or a similar covering, over his or her mouth and nose. Clergy must also cover their nose, mouth and eyes, as outlined in their Liturgical Rubrics. Hand sanitizer must be available at different areas of the Church and used regularly.