



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

7 April 2020

Rest of St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

№. 52

MEMO

To All Rectors and Priests-in-Charge in the Diocese of the Midwest

Glory to Jesus Christ!

As stated in my last letter to you, I indicated I would be writing again about services for Holy Week and Pascha. First I want to convey to you parameters that will continue for a while.

1. All services done in the church need to be behind locked doors and with no more than three people. In the case of clergy and family living next door to the church or within walking distance (a mile or less), the priest and his family can do services.
2. If a priest is in need of someone outside the family to help with the service, then the 3-person rule applies and family members may need to stay home. I am clarifying this as during some of my deanery meetings last week I did say that I counted the priest and his family as one unit. I realize this is not wise and only creates confusion. I hope this clarification is clear.
3. For those clergy who don't live near the church, I do give a blessing to celebrate only Eucharistic services in the church. The doors need to be locked and no more than three people (counting the priest) may assist. Any other non-Eucharistic services are to be done from home.
4. I would encourage you to live stream these services to your parishioners, so they can participate and pray along, as well.
5. It is very important that the appropriate social distancing (6 feet apart) be kept. The priest is to immediately correct this if he observes that this is not being observed. This is extremely critical in places where space is limited, as in Missions or Chapels. Priests in these small places of worship need to contact me should they have any concerns.
6. The following announcement needs to be posted on any entrances to the church. **“AT THE DIRECTION OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA, THE DIOCESAN BISHOP, AND THE LOCAL CIVIL AUTHORITY (if applicable), PUBLIC SERVICES HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED AND THE DOORS HAVE BEEN LOCKED TO OBSERVE THIS DIRECTIVE. THIS IS DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. CONTACT THE PARISH PRIEST IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.”**

As to Holy Week and Pascha, I give the following direction. With the current restrictions, it would be best to cancel flower and palm orders for Palm Sunday and Pascha. At our Deanery Meetings, this issue came up, with many suggestions being offered as to how Palms might be distributed. I grew increasingly uncomfortable with these suggestions, for two reasons. First, the potential for people congregating to pick up palms, however distributed, is unacceptable. Secondly we have no way of knowing how these palms have been handled from the florist to the church. If you have ordered Palms and can't cancel, then store them in a cool place like a refrigerator with water in them. They can be distributed at a later date. This applies to pussywillows as well. Or, both palms and pussywillows can be discarded. The same would apply to such things as distribution of flowers from Holy Friday and Paschal eggs. These are not to be distributed this year. People can dye their eggs at home. They can buy their own palms or flowers to decorate icons.

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Pascha baskets are not to be brought to the church and blessed by clergy. Our Chancellor has put together a brief service for families to bless their baskets at home, which will be made available to you. If parishioners don't have Holy Water, the priest or someone he appoints can prepare bottles of Holy Water (make sure gloves are used in doing this). The priest can make arrangements for people to come individually at staggered times to pick up the Holy Water.

As to the actual services, here is my direction.

All the services of Holy Week can be offered, as long as the above directives 1 to 6 are adhered to. That means that the liturgies for Lazarus Saturday, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Holy Saturday and Holy Pascha may be celebrated. One liturgy for Bright Week may be offered. Then we will revert back to only one liturgy on Sunday.

For priests who do not live near the church, they may serve these liturgies in the church, following the above directives 1 to 6. All other non-Eucharistic services should be done at home.

This blessing to serve all Eucharistic services is not to be viewed as a mandate. If a priest decides not to serve some or all of them, that is understandable, and there will be no consequences for that decision.

Clergy need to give consideration to the length of some of the services such as Holy Thursday night and Holy Friday night. It would be good to cut back on some of the content, as it might be hard to follow the services from home. To assist those who may not be doing live stream, we will make available to you (courtesy of Fr. Stephen Frase) Reader versions of the Bridegroom Services and Matins services. They will be published on the Diocesan website this week. You can also purchase the Lenten and Holy Week service books package from St. Vladimir's Press for \$42 to use.

There are to be **no processions outside the church** on Holy Friday Night or Pascha night or at Paschal Vespers. During Holy Week and Pascha, no bells should be rung. Why no bells?

Many of you have read reflections or heard sermons from various clergy and lay people. One theme that emerges from these is that this year we will celebrate Pascha as a church in exile. We are literally living the words of Psalm 137 we sang earlier in the Lenten cycle. We are weeping asking the question, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" This is the Pascha, as Fr. James Parcels echoed, "none us wanted."

This Pascha we need to heed what St Paul says in his Letter to the Hebrews, "*Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.*" (Hebrews 13:12-13) This will be the Pascha we will celebrate. It will be a Pascha where we look to our Lord, "*Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" (Hebrews 12:2) Let us understand that we are His joy, and He voluntarily goes to the Cross for us men and for our salvation. Even in our exile we will be able to find joy in this.

Should you have any questions about the implementation of these directives, contact me. The blessing of the Lord be upon you. With love in Christ, the unworthy



+PAUL

Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest

Cc.: His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon