



*Orthodox Church in America*  
**DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST**

14 October 2020  
Ven. Paraskeva of Serbia  
№. 140

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

Glory to Jesus Christ!

I am writing to clarify certain matters I mentioned in my Diocesan Report given on October 8, 2020. They concern moving to indoor social hour, icon veneration, and annual meetings.

**Indoor Social Hour**

As we are coming close to a time where outdoor social hour is not possible due to the weather, I need to give direction on indoor social hour that I alluded to in my report. I bless holding social hour indoors under the following conditions. First, you need to treat your halls like a restaurant. People need to wear masks and social distance. But when you sit at the table to drink and have a snack, the masks can come off. People need to be distanced at tables so that if you have an 8 ft. table, 4 can sit; a 6 ft. table, 3 can sit; or a large round table, 4 can sit. Families from the same household may sit at one table. All tables should be spaced 6 feet apart (or leave a table empty if spacing is not possible). When one gets up from the table, **masks need to be worn**. As long as one is walking around and not seated, masks need to be worn. For now, hot and cold refreshments along with packaged snacks are fine. Should there be a time that there is a need for a special meal, it should be catered and served in individual boxes.

**Icon veneration**

As to the veneration of icons, I do bless a return to kissing icons under the following condition. Each person would have a sanitizing wipe to wipe each icon they kiss after venerating it allowing the next person to do so. In turn, that person would follow the same practice. The only concern the rector or priest in charge should be aware of is that the icon is properly protected so that it is not harmed by the wipe used. In this case, laminated icons are perfect. Written icons protected by glass or a proper coating that won't result in the icon being affected by using wipes are fine as well. I leave it up to each rector or priest-in-charge to decide if the parish/mission/chapel is ready for this.

### Annual Meetings

The last issue to speak on is annual meetings. The uniform bylaws insist upon members being actually present for the annual meeting. This is based on normal circumstances being in place. That is not the current case with the pandemic. Since the work of the Church needs to continue, I do bless the following: For those churches that can hold an annual meeting with proper social distancing and masking, I don't see why a parish can't hold the meeting in person. However, that may not work in parishes that don't have the space to safely accommodate larger numbers. So I would bless the use of a Zoom platform for people to log in to participate in the meeting. Zoom seems to be the best application to use. It can handle larger groups of people, and it has a hand-raising feature that allows for voting. It also has the chat feature to do so.

It would not be appropriate for people to use their phone to call in for a meeting with audio only. I will not bless that.

Should there be a need to do the entire meeting on something like Zoom, speak with me first to share with me your particular circumstances. It is very important here that parishioners receive parish documents at least a week ahead of time to properly review information. This will help to improve the meeting. There is no reason why the usual business of the meeting such as presenting reports, passing a budget, and electing a council can't take place.

In the event the parish will be making a decision to approve major unbudgeted expenses (as specified in parish bylaws), approve the sale or buying of property, or approve new by laws, all of which require a  $\frac{2}{3}$ s majority vote, speak with me first before holding the meeting to secure my blessing.

That is all I have to share for now. If you have any questions about the above directives, don't hesitate to contact me.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you all. The unworthy

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul".

**+PAUL**

Archbishop of Chicago and the Midwest

Cc.: His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon