



# **GUIDELINES & CONSIDERATIONS FOR SAFER ORTHODOX CHURCH SERVICES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**



**JUNE 2020 | PREPARED BY COVID-19 ASSEMBLY OF BISHOPS TASK FORCE**

# Contents

<b>For Church Leadership .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Communication .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Building Operations .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Cleaning .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Precautions.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>After Exposure .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>For Clergy &amp; Servers .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>For Chanters &amp; Singers.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Appendix: General risk-reducing measures .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>8</b>

The majority of measures are supported by common sense and evidence from other, similar pathogens. However, not all is known about COVID-19 and some may not ultimately be found to reduce the risk of transmission. We will not reiterate all the **general risk-reduction measures**, but would also recommend as many of these measures be implemented as possible to lower risks. **The more recommendations that are combined the lower the risk would be expected to be, and in some cases, combination would be expected to be synergistic.** In addition, we would like to highlight the following risk-reducing measures specific to Orthodox services.



## For Church Leadership

### Communication

- ❖ Consider posting signs at entryways reminding all to return home if ill and to practice physical distancing and healthy hygiene measures such as handwashing.
- ❖ Provide physical guides (such as tape on floors or walkways and signs on walls) to ensure people remain at least 6 feet apart in lines and at other times. Consider one-way routes in aisles and hallways where possible.
- ❖ Communicate clearly about actions being taken to protect their health.

### Building Operations

- ❖ Ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, etc., but do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk to children using the facility.
- ❖ Take steps to ensure that all buildings and water systems and features (for example, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown to minimize the risk of Legionnaires' disease and other diseases (1).
- ❖ Consider holding services and gatherings in a large, well-ventilated area or outdoors, as circumstances allow.
- ❖ Consider temporarily limiting the sharing of frequently touched objects, such as prayer books, hymnals, or other items passed or among congregants by encouraging congregants to bring their own such items, if possible, or by photocopying materials.
- ❖ If a nursery or childcare will be provided during services and events, refer to CDC's information on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in childcare settings and adapt as needed for your setting.



## Cleaning

- ❖ Have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including:
  - Soap
  - Hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol (for those who can safely use hand sanitizer)
  - Tissues
  - No-touch trash cans
  - Wipes
- ❖ If your church offers multiple services in one day, consider scheduling services far enough apart to allow time for cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces between services.

## Precautions

- ❖ Consider having someone wearing appropriate PPE to take the temperature of parishioners as they enter the church.
  - Anyone with a recorded temperature of equal to or greater than 100.3 degrees should be sent home.
- ❖ Have at least 6 feet of distance between persons not living in the same household.
  - Help to enforce by considering closing and marking off every other row of pews, etc.
  - Encourage people to sit/stand as far apart as possible (use colored tape to designate sitting positions in the pews).
- ❖ Wear cloth face coverings / masks unless there is a contraindication (*e.g., claustrophobia, breathing issue, communication difficulty, or very young age*) when physical distancing may not be possible, *e.g., entering / exiting the building, queuing for Communion, receipt of antidoron, etc.* Consider suggesting cloth face coverings / masks at all times as tolerated when in enclosed spaces.
- ❖ Modify the methods used to receive financial contributions.
  - Consider a stationary collection box or electronic methods of collection as the main means of regular financial contributions instead of shared collection trays or baskets.
  - With regard to the collections, even if they are stationary, those who will count the currency are strongly encouraged to wear masks and gloves while performing their duty.
- ❖ Discourage interpersonal physical contact (*e.g., shaking hands, hugging, or kissing*).



## After Exposure

- ❖ Develop a plan should someone become sick during a service (e.g., a separate area until the person can be transported home or to a healthcare facility).
- ❖ Notify local health officials if a person diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the facility and communicate with staff and congregants about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or other applicable laws.
- ❖ Advise those with exposure to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home, self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- ❖ Close off areas used by the sick person and do not use the area until after cleaning and disinfection.
  - Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants and keep disinfectant products away from children.
- ❖ Advise those with symptoms of COVID-19 or who have tested positive for COVID-19 not to return to the facility until they have met CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation.



## For Clergy & Servers

- ❖ As much as possible, create small, stable groups of clergy and servers who serve together exclusively since these persons will be not be able to maintain physical distancing at all times.
- ❖ Consider having non-clergy servers wear cloth face coverings / masks especially when unable to physically distance.
- ❖ If any of the serving group becomes ill (fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea (1)) the planned service should canceled and future services should not be held until after consultation with local health authorities and completion of their recommended course of action.
- ❖ Monitor local public health notices daily for status changes.
- ❖ Consider providing exclusive services for those at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19.

## For Chanters & Singers

- ❖ Recommend no choirs, but if they are used, singers should be much greater than 6 feet apart from each other and from other congregants.
- ❖ Recommend at most two chanters separated opposed each other on different sides of the solea from each other.
- ❖ Even with a reduced number of singers, the director or leader should consider not facing the singers but rather face forward or be at the side.



## Appendix: General risk-reducing measures

(From CDC's How to Protect Yourself & Others (2))

- ❖ Wash your hands often.
- ❖ Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- ❖ If soap and water are not readily available, **use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol**. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- ❖ **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands.
- ❖ Avoid close contact.
- ❖ **Avoid close contact with people who are sick, even inside your home**. If possible, maintain 6 feet between the person who is sick and other household members.
- ❖ **Put distance between yourself and other people outside of your home**.
- ❖ Remember that some people without symptoms may be able to spread virus.
- ❖ Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from other people.
- ❖ Do not gather in groups.
- ❖ Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings.
- ❖ Keeping distance from others is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.
- ❖ Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others
- ❖ You could spread COVID-19 to others even if you do not feel sick.
- ❖ Everyone should wear a cloth face cover when they have to go out in public, for example to the grocery store or to pick up other necessities.
- ❖ Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- ❖ The cloth face cover is meant to protect other people in case you are infected.
- ❖ Do NOT use a facemask meant for a healthcare worker.
- ❖ Continue to keep about 6 feet between yourself and others. The cloth face cover is not a substitute for social distancing.
- ❖ Cover coughs and sneezes.



- ❖ **If you are in a private setting and do not have on your cloth face covering, remember to always cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.
- ❖ **Throw used tissues** in the trash.
- ❖ Immediately **wash your hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- ❖ Clean and disinfect.
- ❖ **Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily.** This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.
- ❖ **If surfaces are dirty, clean them.** Use detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- ❖ **Then, use a household disinfectant.** Most common EPA-registered household disinfectants will work.
- ❖ Monitor Your Health.
- ❖ **Be alert for symptoms.** Watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms **of COVID-19.**
- ❖ Especially important if you are running essential errands, going into the office or workplace, and in settings where it may be difficult to keep a physical distance of six feet.
- ❖ **Take your temperature** if symptoms develop.
- ❖ Don't take your temperature within 30 minutes of exercising or after taking medications that could lower your temperature, like acetaminophen.

## References

1. **CDC.** Symptoms of Coronavirus. [Online] 2020.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>.
2. —. How to Protect Yourself and Others. [Online] 2020.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>.

