



# Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church

## Plan to Re-Open for Public Services

We are using the following as sources in proposing this plan:

- Orthodox Church in America (OCA) Directives – *May 1, 2020*
- Diocese of Eastern PA (DOEPA) Directives - *May 8, 2020*
- PA Dept of Health (PADH) Directives
- Center for Disease Control (CDC) Best Practices

Our community is an integral part of the OCA and the DOEPA, which means that we look to our hierarchs to provide direction to us in times of peace and in times of distress. It is important that we pray for them, that they might rightly discern a path for us in these difficult times (*Hebrews 13:7*).

As a community of Faith, our parish is guaranteed freedom of religion and assembly under the First Amendment (*Constitution of the United States*). We are also called as Christians to pray for our civil authorities (*2 Timothy 2:1-4*), and unless they are asking us to violate our faith, we are called to observe their laws and directives (*Romans 13:1-8; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Titus 3:1-3*). We are striving to hold these basic principles in *balance*.

This plan seeks to hold several other things in *balance* –

- The legitimate fear of public gatherings for those in especially vulnerable groups **and** the earnest desire to assemble physically in the Church for those in low risk groups
- The importance of following the lead of our hierarchs **and** the importance of following the recommendations of our public health officials
- The need to minister to families and individuals who *are not comfortable* with the risks of gathering **and** the need to minister to families and individuals who *are comfortable* with the risks of gathering

### OBJECTIVES –

- To lay out a framework where families and individuals can make their **own decision** as it relates to their attendance at church and their personal health, based upon the measures being taken by our community. We cannot guarantee (*and have never been able to guarantee*) a completely risk-free environment - we can only offer reasonable mitigation measures.

- To be mindful that this plan (*and each of us*) needs to be flexible and will necessitate constant re-evaluation based upon real-time circumstances.
- Finally and perhaps most importantly “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the **bond of peace**” (*Ephesians 4:3*) we seek to avoid making any judgements upon anyone for choosing either to attend or not – no one is to be made to feel ashamed *or* to feel justified/proud regardless of their personal choice.
  - These are not “normal” times, and now more than ever we ought to extend grace and understanding to all, even if we disagree.

**“Key” to reading the following pages:**

**OCA Directives** (*Appendix A, B, & C; published May 1, 2020*) **will be listed first in bold** [DOEPA directives/clarifications, if available, in brackets]

- *Our parish plan to address these directives, line by line, are noted in italics*

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Nothing will happen without the blessing of our Diocesan Hierarchy; and in concert with his blessing we will be following the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s three phased matrix for re-opening (*OCA Directives, Appendix C, bullet 1*)

- **RED:** Large gathering prohibited
- **YELLOW:** Large gatherings of more than 25 prohibited. NOTE: This plan anticipates *what we hope to do, with the Bishops blessing*, when Dauphin County enters the yellow phase.
- **GREEN:** Aggressive mitigation lifted

## Appendix A: Preventative Measures

1. **Members of the Church should become familiar with the symptoms of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell), and, if these symptoms present themselves, both seek medical help immediately and self-isolate.**
  - *Review the following article ([link](#)) available at the CDC.gov*
  
2. **In terms of preventing the spread of this virus, the best advice is to follow CDC directives, which currently include: wash hands thoroughly and frequently, cover your coughs and sneezes, avoid sharing personal items, wear a mask, and maintain a social distance of at least six feet.**
  - *Review the following article ([link](#)) available at the CDC.gov*
  
3. **Churches must have hand sanitizer readily available at entrances, outside elevators, and other points of ingress. They should be sure that restrooms are properly stocked with soap, and sanitized frequently, recorded with an accompanying log sheet.**
  - *Hand sanitizer stations will be made available at the front doors, the table in the rear of the nave, and in the basement. Cleaning logs for cleaning the vestibule, nave, altar, basement, and bathrooms will be completed by the responsible volunteers 24 hours following each public service.*
  
4. **Everyone except clergy and singers must wear facemasks in accord with civil directives (clergy may wear plastic face shields at the distribution of communion).**
  - *Children under the **age of 10** [per Diocesan guidelines] are not required to wear a mask. **It should be noted that the CDC recommends that children over the age of 2 wear masks.** Parents are asked to make sure children are able to maintain social distance and other CDC requirements (handwashing, coughing into a tissue, etc.)*
  - *The number of clergy and singers will be minimal. Before and after services, both the clergy and singers will be expected to wear a mask.*
  - *The Priest will wear a mask when preparing Proskomedie and during the distribution of Holy Communion*

**5. Churches must be cleaned routinely between, especially objects that are routinely touched, like door handles, or furniture. Doors should be propped open so that door knobs or handles do not need to be used. It might, in fact, be more practical to have a designated person, an usher or greeter with gloves minding the door.**

- *Vestry persons will be assigned to routinely wipe any fixtures frequently touched.*
- *Vestry persons will be assigned to open doors*

**6. Icons, the blessing cross, and other sacred vessels should be venerated without physical contact.**

- *The faithful are instructed to simply bow for the time being until contact restrictions are lifted*

**7. When giving blessings, bishops and priests should not offer their hands to be kissed.**

- *The faithful are instructed not to kiss the hand of the clergy until contact restrictions are lifted; furthermore they are instructed not to shake hands, exchange hugs or kiss one another until contact restrictions are lifted*

**8. No service books should be distributed or left out for common use.**

- *Service books have been removed from the pews. Service text will be made available on-line. Individuals may print their own copies, or use a device (set to silent) to access the service, noting to avoid the temptation of using the device for other activities while in the Sanctuary.*
- *Bulletins will be available online only*

**9. Unless zapivka can be offered in a safe, individual manner, it should not be offered.**

- *Zapivka (the wine after communion) will not be offered until contact restrictions are lifted*

**10. Unless antidoron [blessed bread] can be presented in a safe, individual manner, it should not be distributed.**

- *Antidoron will not be offered until contact restrictions are lifted*

**11. Priests should modify their censuring patterns and processions to limit exposure, or wear a mask during censings and processions in the Church building.**

- *Censuring patterns will be modified, maintaining social distance from those who are worshipping in the Sanctuary.*

## *Appendix B: Conditions and Cautions to be considered before opening churches*

Before churches are re-opened, the diocesan bishop, in collaboration with diocesan and parish leadership, should consider the following conditions and cautions:

**1. Opening can only be done after a thorough cleaning of the church building.**

- *Parish volunteers will review the recommended cleaning procedures; if volunteers are not available, the parish will hire a cleaning service to complete the initial sanitizing of the church building.*

**2. Ways should be found for everyone in the parish community to come to church for a service on a rotating basis, or at least to visit the church in order to pray and perhaps receive the reserved sacrament.**

- *Following the Divine Liturgy on Sunday (where a limited group will be permitted to attend), the church building will be open until 12:30pm to families and individuals who wish to pray and light a candle. If the church is at capacity (i.e. 10 or 25), then they have to wait until space is available. All are asked to be mindful if others are waiting to enter. Those who enter the church building are asked to follow the same masking, social distance, and contact restrictions as outlined above.*
- *Those who wish to receive Holy Confession and/or Holy Communion from the reserve Sacrament should contact Fr. Stephen*

**3. Methods of calculating how many people can safely be in church, and then identifying where people can be at least six feet away from each other, or other family groupings, should be found. In order to do this, parishes may have to measure the square footage of the church, and calculate how many people can fit into that space, while remaining socially distanced. This will only give a rough estimate since other factors will need to be considered, such as families living together that may stand or sit more closely than those who do not.**

- *Our Sanctuary square footage was obtained by using the Architectural drawings of our church, and a committee will determine the best way to accommodate those present at each service. Ushers will direct families and individuals to their space to worship. See **bullet 5** below.*
- *It should be noted that this requirement cannot possibly accommodate the typical seating preferences of families or individuals. We beg your cooperation in this very dynamic and complex circumstance.*

**4. The best system for determining how people are to come in for services in limited numbers should be found. Precise records of who comes on which day will have to be kept so that those who attended can be contacted if necessary. Using online forms, or having one of the faithful sign them in, for example, could be employed.**

- *We will follow the recommendations of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania when determining how many individuals may enter the church.*
- *Each individual or family will be given a designated Sunday where they may choose to attend the Divine Liturgy in person (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> week, 2<sup>nd</sup> week, 3<sup>rd</sup> week, 4<sup>th</sup> week) based upon the first letter of their last name, and RSVP made online or by contacting Fr. Stephen.*
- *As the faithful enter a volunteer will record the attendance. This is simply to provide “contact tracing” in the event someone who attends is later found to test positive for COVID-19. It is considered “best practice” to notify others who have attended an event that they were potentially exposed.*

**Those attending will have to be told the following:**

- **Where they can enter the church**
  - *Front doors, which weather permitting will be left open, or monitored by a volunteer*
- **Where they can hang their coats and place any personal belongings**
  - *Keep your personal belongings on your person*
- **Where they must sanitize or wash their hands**
  - *Hand sanitizing stations will be located throughout the church building*
- **That their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be inspected**
  - *If a volunteer notices a defect in a persons mask they will offer them a mask from a supply maintained by the church*
- **An individual may be designated to light candles for people**
  - *A volunteer, wearing a mask and gloves will hand candles to anyone wishing to light one.*
- **That an usher will lead them to a designated place**
  - *See bullet 4 above*
- **That masks will be available to them (parishes are strongly encouraged to have [a] supply of masks readily available).**
  - *See bullet 4 above. The parish will have masks available.*

**5. For the purposes of screening people as they come in, churches will need an usher or a doorkeeper, who can ensure that the faithful are following the directives of the Church.**

- *Volunteers will be trained and assigned for each service*

**6. In certain places, temperature checks at the door might be necessary.**

- *We do not currently have plans to provide temperature checks. If circumstances change we will develop a plan to address this.*

**7. The number of people in [the] altar must be limited; the placement of singers and choir need to match social distancing requirements. Since those reading loudly or singing may be sources of the virus through the projection of their voices, all choirs should be moved to the optimal location to keep such possibility to a minimum (for example, moving the choirs to the front of the nave).**

- *The Priest and at most two (2) assistants will be permitted in the Altar at any time. Those not liturgizing will be required to wear a mask.*
- *A limited choir (1-4 singers) will sing at the front of the church. Best practices to limit the impact of aerosolization caused by singing will be consistently monitored. When not singing, choir members will be required to wear masks.*

**8. Signs should be posted on the front door of the church explaining the directives and stating the assumed risk of those entering by age and preconditions.**

- *Please see Appendix D for a copy of the notice.*

**9. Consideration of “at-risk” groups must be taken into account.**

- *Live-streaming of services will continue, especially in consideration of those who are in any of the “at risk” categories; and those not comfortable returning.*
- *Virtual education and fellowship will continue for the foreseeable future*

## *Appendix C: Questions to ask before re-opening*

Prior to addressing any of these questions, each church (parish, institutions, mission, mission station, or chapel) needs to understand and follow strictly the directives from the Holy Synod and the Diocesan Bishop, and the civil decrees. Churches should be sure that they have the express blessing, which is given directly to the church or from a diocesan-wide blessing, from their Diocesan Bishop to re-open, and at what stage they can be re-opened.

**Questions to be asked before Churches are re-opened:**

**1. Do the civil directives allow for re-opening?**

- *We will closely monitor the Commonwealth of PA's three phased matrix for their recommendations*

**2. Is the priest a member of the vulnerable population as defined by the civil authorities (is he over 65? Does he have pre-existing medical conditions?)? Does he have a wife or household member who works in healthcare who is in contact with COVID-19 patients?**

- *Our rector and deacons are currently not affected by this. If they wish to, our attached Priests will need a blessing from our Diocesan Hierarchy before attending services.*

**3. Has the church building been thoroughly cleaned? Is a plan in place for the regular cleaning of the church after each service?**

- *Our church building will be cleaned to approved standards prior to opening, and will be on a regular schedule of cleaning following each public service.*
- *Per CDC recommendations we will wait 24 hours until our staff and volunteers arrive to clean.*

**4. Does the church have a plan to accommodate faithful in the church building that meets the requirements for social distancing? Does the choir have such a plan?**

[DOEPA - Outdoor services when weather permits is a fully acceptable option as it is the practice during pilgrimages at many monasteries. Our goal must be to serve our people while reducing risk. Proper precautions must remain in place]

- *A committee has been tasked to review our building square footage and to lay out a plan to accommodate at least six feet social distance at each service; as well as proper social distance for any outdoor services.*
- *Our choir director has been tasked to submit a plan in concert with these directives. See Appendix B, bullet 7*



5. **Does the church have necessary equipment for re-opening (hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, PPE)?**
  - *Masks, sanitizer, cleaning supplies etc. are ordered and on-hand*
  
6. **Does the church have the necessary personnel trained to assist in the services (an usher, or a greeter, for example)?**
  - *Our parish Safety Committee, Vestry Persons, and other volunteers will be trained in person or via webinar (TBD)*
  - *A “punch-list” of responsibilities before and after services will be provided for all volunteers. It will be overseen by a coordinator.*
  
7. **Does the church have a plan to make sure all members of the congregation who are able may come to services?**
  - *See Appendix B, bullet 4*
  
8. **Is a plan, blessed by the bishop, in place for the distribution of communion?**

[Per the Archbishop's directive, the method for the distribution of Communion will not be altered, with the exception that in the place of a common cloth, the faithful may use a napkin to wipe their lips following their reception of Holy Communion]

*This plan was approved unanimously by our Parish Council on **Thursday, May 21, 2020** and submitted to His Eminence Archbishop Mark of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania for his blessing the same evening.*

*Appendix D: Attendance Directives* (To be posted on our church doors!)



**Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church**  
*Attendance Directives*

**DO NOT ENTER IF:**

- You have symptoms of or currently have COVID-19.
- You are a healthcare professional who cares for COVID-19 patients.
- You have been exposed to or are caring for those with COVID-19.
- You are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 due to age or an underlying medical condition.

**UPON ENTERING:**

- Sanitize your hands and maintain at least six (6) feet social distancing at all times. A volunteer will hand you a candle if you wish to light one.
- Wear a mask (*children under 10 years old are not required to wear masks; however it should be noted that the CDC recommends that children over the age of 2 wear masks.*)
- Do not kiss the icons, the chalice, or the priest's hand.
- A greeter will direct you to a place in the nave. Please remain at your designated spot during the service.
- Depart promptly after the service, maintaining social distancing protocols.

## CAUTION:

According to the CDC, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, including:

- People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- People who have serious heart conditions, and/or hypertension
- People who are immunocompromised
- People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
- People with diabetes
- People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
- People with liver disease

## DISCLAIMER:

While **Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church** is taking reasonable and prudent precautions to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19, ***we cannot guarantee*** that you will not become infected. Attending services may increase your risk of contracting COVID-19, especially if you are over 65 years old or have an underlying health condition. ***By entering, you voluntarily assume this increased risk of exposure or potential infection from the virus, or viruses causing COVID-19.***