

# *The Faithful Servant*

## Special edition

At the Archdiocesan Council meeting of the Archdiocese of Washington, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, our diocesan bishop, announced that beyond local civil ordinances there would be no further directives from him as to how the parishes of the diocese are to deal with the COVID pandemic. He stated that he expects the pastors to use common sense in evaluating their local situations and apply cautionary measures accordingly. He also mentioned that it may happen that directives may be reapplied if there is a resurgence of the virus.

There are few clear-cut directives or ordinances from Washington County or the city of Hagerstown. Furthermore, it has been reported that the incidence of infection in our county has declined rather precipitously to where it is no longer among the leaders in the rate of infection in Maryland.

So that means we all go back to normal and attend services, venerate holy items, receive the sacraments and socialize as we always had in the past, since it's all over, right? Not quite, though there will be some significant changes. We will be closer to "normalcy" than we have been since March of 2020. Read on.

**Attendance and Seating:** There will not be a sign-up sheet nor a check-in for attendance in the near future. We are no longer held by a limit on attendance. Seating in the pews will be open. You'll notice by Sunday that the masking tape marking distancing has been removed (Pardon the residue from the tape that may still be on the benches until we figure how to get it off. Good news: we have very effective masking tape!)

However, while there is not an attendance limit nor a distancing requirement, we ask that common sense be used. This thing isn't quite over yet. If you--or your children--are under the weather, especially from respiratory conditions, it would be wise to limit your attendance. So far, since our attendance limit has been increased to 40, spacing between households hasn't really been an issue. We'll see how it goes for now, but discretion is advised.

Masking is optional, but strongly encouraged for those who have not yet received vaccinations. And do not feel restricted in your use of masks if you feel you should, anyway. At this point, no one is going to tell you **not** to mask up!

Be sensible about physical contact. This can be a rather big hugging parish! There are times when this has been apparent in the last couple years when perhaps it shouldn't

have been (and quite possibly I should have said something then!). If you are sniffing and snorting...well, maybe you should be questioning whether you should be among us (or anyone!) to begin with, but once you're here spare your brothers and sisters in church from whatever you have! Yes, we all want to show our affection and concern for each other again, but let's demonstrate our **true** concern for each other and make sure we're over this--or whatever else we may have--first!

For the time being, live streaming of services will continue. If you need to stay home, make use of it! But all things being equal, and for those in good health, we very much are looking forward to having you with us once again!

One more thing: if you still **do** test positive for the COVID-19 virus, it is imperative that you **let me know!**

**Veneration of Icons, Crosses, etc.:** I ask you still to be guarded about veneration by kissing icons and such. I am still wary of too many mouths on a small surface. It might be a good idea to limit such veneration for a bit. And do be aware of what I said in the last newsletter issue--it seems some people are spending more time and thought in their veneration by merely bowing than they had done before the limitations. This could, then apply to venerating the Cross at the end of Liturgy, too. I am open to advisement on this.

**Communion and Antidoron:** For the same reasons as above, I suggest we continue to distribute Communion as we have been. First of all, let's keep the individual paper towels to wipe off your mouth as needed. As we have been doing, we will dispose of the paper towels in the proper and respectful fashion. The cloth will be there to prevent spills.

Let's also keep with the no-to-minimal-contact, "dump truck" method of receiving; that is to say, come close, bend down some, tilt your head way back, and **open wide!** I will then drop the Sacrament into your mouth. I will stand on the bottom altar step to facilitate this, rather than on the floor. For those who have trouble either scrunching down or tilting their head very far, we'll deal with as best we can, as we've been doing.

As far as venerating/kissing the Cup, let's understand something: though some local/national traditions in the Orthodox Church practically demand this (and many of us may be used to it), there are others (no names mentioned) who demand **exactly the opposite!** Their people are instructed explicitly **not** to kiss the Cup after receiving, out of respect (in that way), and for some fear of jostling crumbs of the Precious Body. And this custom in those places is of long-standing--it's nothing new or anything that has come in with concern for any kind of infection. My very strong suggestion for now is that we follow this practice and continue to refrain from kissing the Chalice after receiving.

I do think we can go back to putting antidoron out "in bulk;" i.e., not "individually wrapped." This will be a great relief to myself, Oleg Salcutan, and "Fr. Cyprian" who are serving in the altar, trying to get enough cut and bagged in time! If you take a commemorative bread for your beloved living and departed, though, we will be sure that those can be identified--perhaps those will remain wrapped for that reason. By the way, that practice is becoming more and more prevalent; last week we hadn't laid out enough loaves and needed to grab a couple more from the freezer before the Great Entrance!

**The Hall:** Right now, there are two chairs on each side of each table, as well as those at the head and foot of each. There had been three, but we removed the middle one for the sake of spacing. I suggest we keep it thus until we see how many are coming for coffee hour, meetings, etc.

This Sunday we have the Mearfare Sunday luncheon scheduled. I suggest we keep it at two-a-side to begin, anyway, and adjust as may be needed.

**Many Thanks:** I am extremely grateful to all of you for your patience, cooperation and, yes, obedience through this time of "plague and pestilence" (as I've been referring to it in the petitions at Liturgy). We are not completely through it all yet, though a great deal of progress has been made lately. Vigilance is still called for, and I ask for your continued patience and assistance in getting through all this. But you have generally performed admirably. Let's continue to function with the good of each other and the preservation of the life of our Church in mind. See Romans 15:1-6.

I am grateful to our diocesan bishop, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, for his guidance through these difficult times. I am convinced that his decisions and directives have always come from motives of genuine concern for the welfare of the Holy Church, his own diocese and for all its members. I have tried to faithfully keep the life of St. Catherine's in compliance with everything he and the Synod have passed down to us. Likewise, I am grateful to our diocesan Chancellor, Fr. John Vitko, for his advice and encouragement (and, need I add, patience!) in our dealing with the COVID situation as well as others we have faced, especially given my previous absence and return to service. He has always made himself available to hear me out on everything St. Catherine's has faced in the last few years.

Of course, thanks must be given to our blessed Lord for the progress that has been made and for keeping us in the degree of health, safety and peace in which we find ourselves. Also, we have learned much about ourselves in the process and have discovered new ways in which to serve God's people that will carry over into times of restoration and prosperity. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17, quoted in the text of the Divine Liturgy); through our hardships, we have

not been lacking such gifts. We thank God and ask Him for His continued blessings as we proceed.

And, yes, we should do something here to mark that gratitude. I believe it is too early to hold a general service of thanksgiving, lest we assume that everything is instantly back to where it was. But here's something from the **Service of General Thanksgiving** as found in the book **Services of Intercession and Thanksgiving** published by the OCA's Department of Liturgical Music, 1982. It is a prayer and hymn which dates back to the 4th century, variously ascribed to Sts. Ambrose, Augustine, Paulinus of Nola or Nicetas of Remesiana, entitled **Te Deum Laudamus** ("We praise Thee, O God," often simply referred to as the **Te Deum**). I offer it here for our individual use for now, and look forward to when we feel it's appropriate to sing it together to thank Our Lord for removing this plague from us:

We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.  
All the earth worships Thee, the Father everlasting.  
To Thee all the angels cry aloud, the heavens and all the powers therein.  
To Thee the Cherubim and Seraphim continually cry aloud:  
"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts!  
Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory!"  
The glorious choir of the Apostles praise Thee.  
The noble fellowship of the prophets praise Thee.  
The white-robed army of martyrs praise Thee.  
The Holy Church throughout the world confesses Thee,  
O Father of infinite majesty, Thine adorable, true and only Son,  
and the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.  
Thou art the King of glory, O Christ.  
Thou art the Son of the everlasting Father.  
When Thou didst come to deliver man,  
Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.  
Thou didst overcome the sting of death  
And open to believers the Kingdom of Heaven.  
Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father.  
We believe that Thou wilt come to be our judge.  
We therefore beseech Thee to help Thy servants  
Whom Thou has redeemed with Thy Precious Blood.  
Make them to be numbered with Thy saints in everlasting glory!