



**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE**  
**OF NORTH AMERICA**

March 4, 2021

Beloved in Christ,

I commend you for your ministry during this tumultuous time, as most of you have been cooperative to our directives. It has been and remains an ever-changing situation, yet with God's help, we will continue to work together based on the best information we have. I am dedicated to provide the best directives possible for your spiritual and physical well-being. With that in mind, as we begin our journey to Pascha, I offer the following directives as we move forward. These supersede all previous directives for both the clergy and faithful:

1. First and foremost, we must focus on Christ and His Resurrection. This past year has been a divisive and passionate one. The goal of the fast is to be dispassionate and focused on our own sins. By being obedient to Christ and the Church we share in God's grace instead of our pride and self-direction. Let us be good examples to our faithful and teach them to do the same. Let's heal our divisions and be examples to our nation.
2. **Masks:** Masks should continue to be worn in church, however, in those areas of greatly decreasing numbers, where the state government allows, the faithful may lower or remove their masks for periods of time. When people move about the church or enter or exit, masks should continue to be worn. Clergy should continue to wear masks while interacting closely with parishioners before and after services. As we will be having many more services during this time, we are to remain vigilant. We would like to avoid getting sick and having to close any church during this holy season.
3. **Social Distancing:** Social distancing and capacity controls are to be followed according to the maximum capacity that the parish can properly socially distance. (with certain exceptions for Canada where the laws are more restrictive). Parishioners should continue to refrain from close contact outside their family pods (e.g. no kiss of peace, modified rite of Forgiveness whereby people prostrate and bow with their hands crossed over their chests, etc.).
4. **Church Schools:** They may resume (or continue) with the guidance of the local bishop with all precautions in place including proper ventilation, cleaning, etc.

*"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)*

5. **Coffee Hours, meetings, Lenten potlucks, meals, etc.:** Unless they can be done outside or safely in a well-ventilated hall with proper distancing, etc. they are still not allowed. There should be no buffet lines in any case.
6. **Hall and Room Rentals:** For parishes with commercial rental facilities, you may resume business operations in accordance with the local and state laws with regard to reception halls, schools, and other public gatherings after Pascha with the blessing of the local bishop.

This directive represents how we are to enter the Great Fast with regard to the pandemic. If you have questions, please seek the guidance of your local bishop or email us and we will do our best to help you. Again, we want our focus during this time to be on piety and overcoming the passions. Therefore, implement these directives in a positive light with the idea that while we are doing what we can to return to “normal”, we continue to be cautious and vigilant, so we do not have to close even a single church during the fast due to an exposure in one of our parishes. Then turn your entire focus to prayer, fasting and almsgiving and encourage your parishioners to do the same.

As we approach Holy Week and Pascha, we will continue to monitor the situation and give further direction as to processions and increased capacities if things continue to improve.

Wishing you, your families, and your faithful a blessed Fast, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,



**+JOSEPH**

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

*“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)*

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