



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA  
**METROPOLIS OF ATLANTA**

# Updated Metropolis COVID Safety Guidelines (April 8th)

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**April 8, 2021**

The Holy Apostles of the Seventy Herodion, Agabus, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon, and Hermes

My Beloved concelebrants in the Lord, esteemed Parish Council Presidents and members, Philoptochos Presidents and members, Revered Monastics and faithful,

I greet you my beloved with love and joy as we approach Holy Week.

My heart is filled with renewed joy and happiness, as we draw near to the most Holy time of the year, as we become participants in Christ's, Death, Burial and Resurrection. In 2020, due to the pandemic, the faithful participated in Holy Week services from their homes—an unprecedented phenomenon. As the Body of Christ, we lamented that we were not able to be physically present to receive God's transformative Sacramental blessings. One year later, we find ourselves in a different situation; though the Coronavirus is still with us, we are blessed to have—with some limitations—our spiritual homes open.

As we move forward and some restrictions are being eased, my mind cannot help but remember the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, "*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.*" (1 Cor. 10:23-24)

I would like to convey to all the faithful of the God-protected Metropolis of Atlanta, in a spirit of love and well-being, that we were able to host a webinar with the Clergy and Parish Council Presidents on Tuesday, April 6, in which additional changes to the COVID guidelines were discussed.

This current letter is a follow-up to **[the one that was sent on March 30, 2021, which can be viewed HERE](#)**. Below, you will find answers to the questions that were submitted both before and during the webinar [on April 2, 2021].

With the help of all those who joined, a sense of peace and understanding was achieved as we strove toward our main focus, which is to help the faithful return to worship. Perhaps not everyone will return immediately, however, we must do our best to meet the needs of the faithful, using common sense, flexibility, patience and understanding. In peace and harmony, we must work towards our ultimate goal, which is the reopening of our communities for worship and fellowship.

I would like to reiterate that everyone must continue to follow all the State and local regulations in your particular area as we move forward in our parishes.

With this in mind, there are some additional adjustments to our current guidelines.

### **Contact Tracing**

- We will continue to write down the names of all those who attend each service, so that if an outbreak occurs all who attended that service may be notified.

### **Physical Distancing**

- All State and local regulations should be followed for distancing requirements; however, pastoral discretion, kindness and flexibility must be considered in serving the needs of all parishioners. For larger households and individuals who are comfortable sitting closer together (including those who have been vaccinated), space may be designated in the church to facilitate this. Additionally, for households and individuals who are more comfortable with physical distancing, space may be designated in the church to facilitate this as well. Where possible, communities that have the required space should consider designating certain areas available for those who wish to worship with respect to physical distancing recommendations, and other areas for those who are more comfortable seated in closer proximity.

### **Masks**

- Masks are to continue being worn by all those attending services, with the momentary removal of the mask just before receiving the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Holy Unction.

### **Candles**

- After an offering is given, and the person has sanitized their hands, they may take their own candle(s) and light them.

### **Veneration of Icons and Liturgical Items**

- Veneration of Icons, the Holy Cross, etc., may occur with the person being masked. If a person decides to momentarily removes their mask to venerate, then there will need to be a dedicated layperson or Altar Server to sanitize the venerated items.

## **Chanters and Choirs**

- Multiple chanters at one chant stand may resume as long as all face forward and are properly distanced from the congregation. Masks are required when not chanting.
- Choirs may resume with masks as spacing may not be adequate to accommodate everyone. However, if masks are removed, then COVID distancing guidelines should be adhered to. Attention should be paid on spacing so that none of the Choir members face the congregation or each other, (if choirs ordinarily face the congregation, please ensure that a safe amount of physical distance is placed, so that the choir will not be in close proximity to the congregation). Choir Directors should avoid standing directly in front of the choir facing them, unless they are wearing a mask or a face shield. Another alternative would be to have a plexiglass separator installed. Masks are required when not singing.

## **Trays**

It is encouraged, but not mandatory, to find other means of receiving donations rather than passing trays. Some suggestions may include:

- Traditional way (wearing gloves and masks)
- Through texting as set up by the parishes' bank
- Website
- Donation app
- Tray at entrance or exit of church
- Other

## **Youth, Education, and Hellenic Culture Diakonia**

- When possible and permitted by State and local regulations, all education classes (Day, Afternoon, Sunday School, and Adult) as well as youth, young adult ministries and meetings may resume in-person teaching and gatherings following all COVID distancing guidelines as described by the CDC including the wearing of masks

## **Fellowship**

- When possible and permitted by State and local regulations, fellowship, luncheons and coffee hours may resume with people following physical distancing guidelines, as these events permit masks not be worn while eating, drinking, etc. Once a person has finished, their mask is to be worn. Any food is to be served by designated individuals who are wearing gloves and masks. Buffets are discouraged, except in instances where the food is distributed by designated servers in proper safety attire (gloves and masks), and where the food lines allow for proper social distancing.
- Dancing may also resume, provided that all are wearing masks and that hands will be washed or sanitized before and after dancing. Handkerchiefs may also be used as an alternative to holding hands.

## Education, Hellenic Culture and Youth Diakonia

- When possible and permitted by State and local regulations, all education classes (Day, Afternoon, Sunday School, and Adult) as well as youth, young adult ministries and meetings may resume in-person teaching and gatherings following all COVID distancing guidelines as described by the CDC including the wearing of masks.

Please accept these changes with compassion and consideration for everyone as we try to bring the faithful back to worshipping in a customary manner in their spiritual home, so that we may address *“one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ to God the Father.”* (Eph. 5:19-20)

May the journey through our Lord's passion bring us to the celebration of Pascha, I remain,

Paternally yours with love and blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexios', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**+ ALEXIOS**  
Metropolitan of Atlanta