COPTIC ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA
DIOCESE OF OHIO, MICHIGAN & INDIANA

COVID-19 CHURCH REOPENING PLANS

June 1, 2020

As public health conditions related to COVID-19 slowly begin to improve in the three states of our diocese, and following the Diocesan statements of March 16 and March 20 limiting then suspending liturgical services, the Diocese will now begin a gradual resumption of liturgical services with limited and controlled participation.

It is important to note that in the three States of our Diocese, there were no regulatory closing of churches but recommendations and guidelines by the CDC, State Governors and health departments limiting activities such as the stay at home orders which led to the decision to limit then suspend liturgical services. This was done out of a concern for public health, the wellbeing of our priests, congregations and communities.

In consultation with the Diocesan Clergy Council, and medical and legal counsel, comparative reviews of the decisions of other denominations in our jurisdiction, it was decided that the parish churches of the diocese will begin a limited resumption of liturgical services in accordance with strict social distancing and screenings beginning on June 1, 2020 which is the Feast of the Lord's Entry to Egypt.

Following the guidelines of the CDC for faith communities, we will take the following safety actions:

- Promote healthy hygiene practices including frequent hand washing and adequate supplies of hand sanitizers, tissues and no-touch trash cans and other no-touch items especially in bathrooms and doorways.
- Require cloth face coverings and masks for all participants, including clergy, as a means to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does

not have symptoms. Face masks should not be worn by children under 2 years or persons who have trouble breathing, unconscious or incapacitated (these persons should be considered high risk and remain at home in this early stage of resumption).

• Intensify cleaning, disinfection and ventilation at the church properties.

• Promote social distancing including limiting the seats open to participants and marking floors with the recommended 6ft/2m spacing in all directions. As a result, the capacity of the buildings will be limited to less than 30% occupancy.

• Removal of books, carpets and other items that can be frequently touched and difficult to disinfect.

• Limitations on the number of deacons and choirs, to reduce increased chances of transmission by singing and chanting.

• Abstaining from hand shaking and physical contact in greetings and replacing with bows and gestures of respect from a distance. We should not shake hands, kiss the priests hand or crosses, icons or the Book of the Gospels. The Greeting of Peace should be done with a bow to one another.

• Each parish church will establish an online registration system for participation in each available Divine Liturgy. Registrants will need to comply with all guidelines and agree to the stated terms as a requirement for the space available on the scheduled date. Participants agree to wear their own protective mask at all times, sanitize their hands upon arrival and allow an external forehead reading to ensure they are fever free. If anyone in the person's family has a temperature over 100.0 F, they must stay home. The registration also states that the participant is entering the premises and attending knowingly and assuming all risks. The Churches can not be liable for someone who chooses to attend then alleges to have contracted the corona virus through the church. Finally, each participant agrees that if they have the virus, are not feeling well in any capacity, they have been instructed NOT to come to church. Likewise, if after they have been to the church and contract the virus within 14 days, they have a moral obligation to report their situation to the clergy so that adequate tracing can be made to safeguard the congregation.

• A safety station at the entrance will ensure that only those who have properly registered, including the clergy, can be admitted, screened for temperature and

sanitize their hands before entering the church. Anyone with even a moderate temperature will be asked to return home.

We believe and have faith in our God who protects and cares for us all. We are also responsible for the health and wellbeing of our congregations and the communities in which we live and work. Together we are doing all we can to safeguard all lives and to return to active participation in the liturgical life of the church. Through the prayers of the Holy Virgin Mary and all the saints, may you all be safe and healthy.

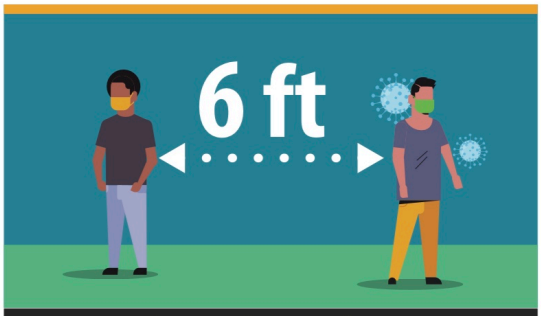
With prayerful best wishes in the Lord,

+ SARAPHIM
Bishop of Ohio, Michigan and Indiana

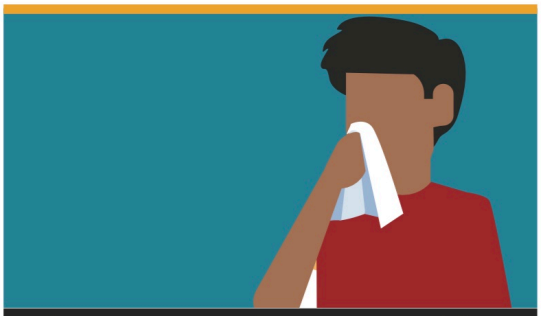
June 1, 2020
Feast of the Lord's Entry to Egypt

Stop the Spread of Germs

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

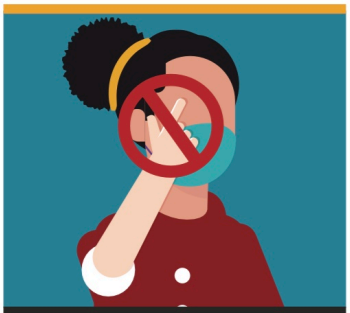


Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from other people.

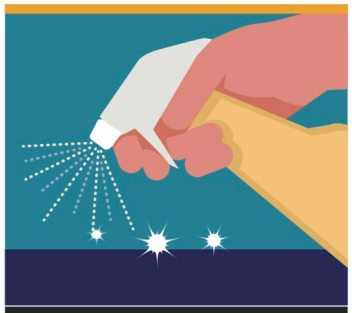


Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.

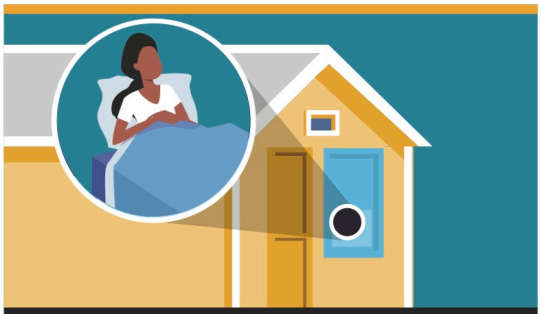
When in public, wear a cloth face covering over your nose and mouth.



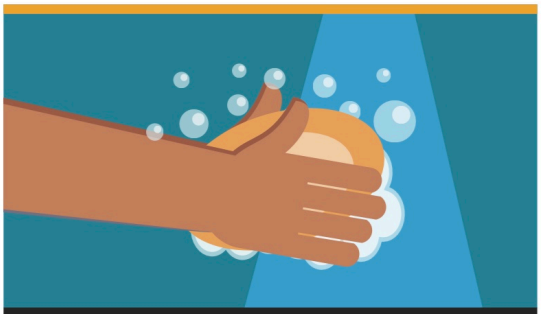
Do not touch your eyes, nose, and mouth.



Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.



Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.



Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

cdc.gov/coronavirus

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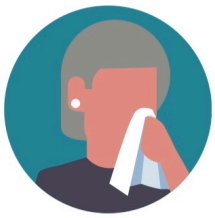
How to Protect Yourself and Others

Know how it spreads



- There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).
- **The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus.**
- The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.
  - » Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
  - » Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.
  - » These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
  - » Some recent studies have suggested that COVID-19 may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.

Everyone should

Clean 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

- **Stay home if you are sick.**
- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick.
- **Put distance between yourself and other people.**
  - » Remember that some people without symptoms may be able to spread virus.
  - » This is especially important for **people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.** www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html

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cdc.gov/coronavirus