

Welcome Back to Church!

On Friday 29 May our spiritual father Metropolitan Antony gave his blessing for our parish community to begin -- gradually and carefully -- opening up services for attendance by the faithful. As His Eminence has stated, this decision is based upon his review and approval of the plan put forward by the Parish Board. I hesitate to say "reopen" because the church has *never* closed. The Holy Eucharist has been offered, and you and your families prayed for, at St. Nicholas parish "on behalf of all for all" throughout the onset of this pandemic and, Lord willing, we will continue to faithfully make that holy offering.

Is it safe to come back?

For all those who desire and feel comfortable with attending the Divine Liturgy, conditions at the church will be as safe as we can make them and procedures implemented consistent with Virginia state law and guidance from the Virginia Department of Health. Those who for any reason are not comfortable with attending services in person are encouraged to continue to pray at home. Anyone in or caring for someone in any high-risk group is advised to stay home. This includes but is not limited to those with cancer, immuno-deficiency/immuno-compromised, cardio-pulmonary conditions, organ transplants, recent surgery, etc. The Lord most assuredly meets us where we are, and most especially when we are not able to be physically present in the church. Please contact Father directly with any questions you may have or to discuss ways Father may best address your individual needs or concerns.

What will be different when I come into the church?

In accordance with state law and public health directives, we are adjusting certain practices and procedures for your safety and the safety of your sisters and brothers in Christ. Everyone will need to wear a mask while in the church. Please maintain at least 6 feet of social distance between you and others who do not live in your household. Masks and hand sanitizer will be made available in the Narthex, and Greeters will assist in helping you find a place to stand or sit. We will refrain from exchanging the kiss of peace, and we will venerate icons, the cross, the Gospel book and the priest's hand by bowing rather than kissing. The social hall and narthex have been reorganized to facilitate social distancing and safe ingress and egress. Masks will be worn by both priest and penitent during Confession. Coffee Hour will remain an online event. The Liturgy will continue to be live-streamed and homilies posted online. And as always, anyone who has a fever or is otherwise unwell should stay home, for the safety of others.

What will be different for children?

For our youth, this time of separation has been especially difficult. We encourage parents to do what is necessary to help the children to feel fully included and safe in the Divine Liturgy, and to please contact Father directly with any concerns or suggestions. We will still invite all children to approach with candles for the reading of the Holy Gospel and to venerate the Gospel with a bow at the end. Families may approach for Holy Communion together, and greeters will assist individuals and families to remain spaced when approaching to receive the Eucharist.

What will happen on our first Sunday Liturgy back at church?

Per our Metropolitan's direction, you will be offered the opportunity celebrate this return to church in specific ways recalling our Lenten journey and Paschal celebrations: We will process into the church carrying the palms and willows of victory, as we would do on Palm Sunday, and we will sing the Paschal Troparion upon our re-entry into the church, affirming the Resurrection and Christ's victory over death. In doing these things, we affirm the fundamentals of our Christian faith and offer thanksgiving for

the manifest blessings the Lord continues to bestow upon us in abundance -- His very life -- even and especially in the midst of this global pandemic.

How About Confession?

Everyone will have the opportunity to have Father hear their confession, as it is a requirement of the Holy Church. Anointing with oil from the Holy Wednesday Unction Service -- another sacrament of the Church -- will also be administered at your first Liturgy back. Please see the weekly bulletin and weekly update email for sign-up information for confession times.

During this time of uncertainty, we must remember that the Lord is our constant and faithful companion. He is the Good Shepherd and we know Him, His peace is our peace, His life is our life, and our place is with Him. Let us choose this moment to redouble our faith and commitment to Him, that our hearts may be illumined by the light of His Holy Gospel. May our celebration of the Liturgy together become the common work of putting His Gospel to work in our hearts, and in the world around us that is in such desperate need of mercy, love and compassion.

With love in Christ,
-fr Charles.