

Checklist for Reopening of Churches

I. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to present a serious threat to physical health and is likely to do so for the foreseeable future. Provincial Governments, therefore, continue to discourage unnecessary activities outside the home; to call for physical distancing, frequent handwashing and appropriate use of masks; and to limit public gatherings to no more than the number specified by Provincial health authorities.

At the same time, for us Orthodox access to the Eucharist and the Church's full sacramental life is of the utmost importance to our spiritual well-being. For this reason, churches are reopening, in a limited way, for celebration of the Liturgy. Reopening will occur in phases before a return to normality, whatever that may look like in the future.

It is important to understand that resumption of public attendance at churches does not mean a return to how we previously celebrated the Liturgy. We must all accept that the novel coronavirus may have significantly changed the way we celebrate the Liturgy. We must understand that this coronavirus is neither the first nor the last that humanity will encounter. In the last twenty years we have experienced SARS, H1N1, Ebola and now the Covid-19 outbreak.

This checklist has been assembled to assist parishes in preparation for the initial reopening of churches with a limited congregation present. The scriptural underpinning for exercising care is our Lord's directive that we love our neighbor as ourselves, which includes not exposing our neighbors to potential harm – in this immediate case – the novel coronavirus. **The checklist is not exhaustive nor a substitute for government or health authority requirements.**

Restrictions will remain in force until further notice or changes by Provincial Governments and the Hierarchy allow or require revision.

Additional resources:

- World Health Organization. Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19. 7 April 2020. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>
- CDC. Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). March 21, 2020. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>

II. General Principles

1. The decision when to reopen churches for the celebration of the Liturgy with a congregation is left to the Parish Council in consultation with the Parish Priest.
2. The Parish Council is responsible for creating and implementing a reopening plan in the parish.
3. The Parish Council must prepare a reopening plan and submit it to the responsible Eparchial Bishop for blessing.
4. Resuming public services **must take place** in strict accord with all the health directives promulgated by Provincial Governments and health authorities including limitations on the number of people allowed at a gathering. The maximum number permitted includes the priest, liturgical ministers, singers, livestream videographers, volunteer greeters and ushers, and anyone else present during the Liturgy.
5. The church must always observe the directives of the provincial health authority, including and especially regarding physical distancing and sanitizing.
6. Social gatherings or fellowship hour before or after the Liturgy (including coffee and donuts) must **not** take place at this phase of reopening.
7. If possible, arrangements must be made to continue on-line livestreaming of the Liturgy simultaneously with the in-person service
8. If, for practical or other reasons, a church is unable to maintain strict physical distancing and perform the cleaning requirements as required by the Provincial Government and health authorities, the church **must not resume** church services.

IMPORTANT: Have you advised all those attending the Liturgy on Sunday do so at their own risk? It is important for individuals and families to take responsibility for protecting themselves and others by adhering to guidelines and rules established for resuming the in-person celebration of the Liturgy. Such adherence is consistent with our Lord's direction that we love our neighbors as ourselves, and in this case, we do so by not exposing our neighbors to potential harm of the coronavirus.

III. Suggested Checklist

Preliminary:	Yes	No
*Have you reviewed the applicable Provincial government and health authority guidelines on reopening places of worship?	✓	
*Are there limitations and restrictions applicable to your church?	✓	
*Are you prepared to comply with all Provincial government and health authority requirements?	✓	
*Have you prepared a reopening plan?	✓	

*Have you sent a copy of your reopening plan to your Eparchial Bishop?	✓	
*A mandatory yes answer to the above questions is required before reopening may be considered		
Have you attached a copy of Provincial government and health authority requirements to your reopening plan?	✓	
Did you obtain the Eparchial Bishop's Blessing to proceed?	✓	
Limitations:	Yes	No
Did you prohibit the following parishioners from attending church for the sake of the wider community:		
• People with COVID-19 or who live with someone with COVID-19?	✓	
• People who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19?	✓	
• The sick, including those with even the slightest symptoms or feelings of sickness, especially if with upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms?	✓	
• Those who have recently travelled outside of Canada?	✓	
	Yes	No
Did you encourage the following parishioners to stay home for the sake of the wider community:		
▪ People who live with someone with upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms?	✓	
▪ People with underlying or comprised medical conditions?	✓	
▪ The elderly, 65 years of age and older, who fall into a high risk category?	✓	
▪ Family members who live with elderly people or those who are at risk?	✓	
Did you ascertain whether your priest has experienced a respiratory infection of any kind, or symptoms currently recognized as indicative of Covid-19, or has had contact with at risk individuals without wearing Personal Protective Equipment?	✓	
Did you ascertain whether your priest is in a high risk category?	✓	
Did you ascertain your priest's ability and willingness to celebrate the Liturgy?	✓	
Did you ascertain whether elders, cantors, choir director, ushers, greeters and altar boys who might serve at the Liturgy experienced a respiratory infection of any kind, or symptoms currently recognized as indicative of Covid-19, or have had contact with at risk individuals without wearing Personal Protective Equipment?	✓	

If the Liturgy is livestreamed to the parish hall, have you ensured that the hall was appropriately sanitized and other safety precautions are observed?	—	—
Communication	Yes	No
Have created a communication plan to communicate clearly and effectively via email, phone, and web site this reopening plan to all parishioners?	✓	
Have you determined a fair and equitable method for assigning parishioners to attend a Liturgy based on a rotation system based on the first letter of last names (alphabetical) or on some other basis designed to ensure that all who wish may attend in due course?	✓	
Does your Liturgical schedule allow sufficient time for cleaning and sanitizing, and will it be published?	✓	
Have the rules outlining how the Liturgy will be conducted and the expected behavior of the faithful attending been clearly communicated to parishioners in advance and posted at the entrance to the church building?	✓	
Have you a plan for parishioners to sign up or communicate an intention to attend a specific Liturgy?	✓	
Have developed a series of questions to ask potential attendees related to coronavirus exposure which they must answer fully and truthfully?	✓	
Have you created a database record of the contact information of, and answers provided by, those who propose to and do attend each Liturgy so that, in the case an individual tests positive for COVID-19, the Parish Council will be able to assist public health officials with contact tracing everyone who may have been exposed?	✓	
Have you arranged for simultaneous livestreaming, if possible, of Liturgies from the church for as long as restrictions remain in force?	—	—
Volunteers	Yes	No
While their contributions are greatly appreciated, have you encouraged elderly and high risk volunteers to let others, who are less at risk, take on the volunteer duties required at this time?	✓	
Have you arranged for volunteers to be masked, identified by badges or other means, and able to interact with the faithful while still maintaining physical distancing?	✓	

Do the volunteers have a copy of a "check list" or other way of confirming that those arriving have signed up and that their contact information is available?	✓	
Have you arranged for volunteer usher/greeters to offer hand-sanitizer (Spraying or squirting the disinfectant into people's hands)?	✓	
Have you arranged for volunteer ushers to direct attendees to available pews?	✓	
Physical Distancing	Yes	No
Do your Provincial authorities require physical distancing?	✓	
Have you taken steps to ensure physical distancing everywhere on church property (in the church, on the steps, in the parking lot, etc.); that is, close contact with those outside one's household must not be within two meters of another person?	✓	
Where possible, have you arranged for the use of markers and signs to delineate two-meter separation and direction of movement in church aisles?	✓	
Have you taken steps to ensure that attendees do not gather in the vestibule or near the doors of the church before or after the Liturgy?	✓	
If the priest wishes to greet parishioners after the Liturgy, have ensured that the priest will maintain physical distancing and wear a face mask?	✓	
Have you developed rules for parishioners to wear face masks if approaching the priest?	✓	
Use of Masks Generally	Yes	No
Is the use of face masks/coverings by persons attending a gathering required by Provincial health authorities?	✓	
Are you going to require parishioners to wear face masks generally while in the church?	✓	
Will the church have masks available for parishioners and be able to offer one to those who would like one?	✓	
Signage	Yes	No
Have you arranged for signs to be placed on church doors to indicate the Liturgical schedule and provide a telephone number and email address for people wanting to attend following the method determined by the Parish Council?	✓	

Have you arranged to post guidelines on physical distancing guidelines on the church doors or in the vestibules and, if appropriate, elsewhere inside the church?	✓	
Have you placed markers on the ground before the entrance to the church to indicate two-meter intervals where people may wait to be admitted?	✓	
Have you arranged to post rules of behavior in regard to the conduct of the Liturgy?	✓	
Since a Liturgy is not a spectator event but a participatory one, have you arranged to communicate any changes in Liturgical practices in advance to the faithful, posted in the church, and announced by the priest at the beginning of the Liturgy?	✓	
Entrances and Exits	Yes	No
Do you have at least one entrance open and accessible to the handicapped?	✓	
If more than one entrance is open, have you taken steps to ensure that the overall number of people entering the facility is controlled and to provide for their proper sanitation?	✓	
Have you arranged, when possible, to have entrance and exit doors propped open as people enter/exit, so that the faithful need not touch the handles or doors to enter or exit?	✓	
Have you arranged for or one-way directional indicators to be used at the end of the Liturgy to expedite departure and minimize chances of people encountering one another?	✓	
Have you had aisles marked with one-way indicators to avoid people passing by each other as much as possible?	✓	
Have you arranged for ushers to be stationed at the church entrance to monitor those who enter, reminding them of the requirement for physical distancing of two meters and for sanitizing their hands? (Note: members of a single household may enter and exit together, since they do not need to practice physical distancing with each other)	✓	
Have you ensured that ushers and greeters understand that once the maximum number of persons in the church is reached, no one else may enter? People who simply show up must be turned away at the entrance.	✓	
Have you arranged to redirect excess attendees to an overflow space, if one is available?	✓	

Have you arranged for parishioners with a way to contact the parish, so that they can make the necessary arrangements to be included at a future Liturgy?	✓	
Seating	Yes	No
Have you arranged to restrict seating to every second or third pew (or row of seats) to maintain physical distancing?	✓	
Have you clearly marked seats which can be used with painters' tape?	✓	
Have you arranged to cordon off rows with painters' tape or yellow caution tape, which will not mar the pews?	✓	
Use of Restrooms and Cry Rooms		
If washrooms are to remain open, have you arranged for an usher to be present to ensure that only one person enters and uses the washroom facilities at any one time?	✓	
Have you arranged to have sufficient soap, disposable towels, hand sanitizers and hand sanitizing wipes to be available in the washrooms open for use?	✓	
Have you arranged either to close or restrict parish cry rooms to one family?	✓	
Have you arranged for cry rooms to be carefully cleaned and sanitized after use?	✓	
Cleaning and Sanitizing/Disinfecting Generally	Yes	No
Have ensured an adequate stock of hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies, including disposable gloves for cleaners, to be readily available at the time of reopening?	✓	
Have you arranged for hand sanitizing to take place near the entrance to the church for those coming to church?	✓	
Have you arranged for the use an automatic dispenser or have an usher/greeter wearing a mask and gloves spray the hands of those entering?	✓	
Have you arranged to provide sanitizing wipes to be distributed to those entering to wipe down the pew where they will be sitting if they so wish?	✓	
Have you arranged for cleaning and sanitizing the pews and other commonly touched surfaces, as well as restrooms, immediately after every service?	✓	

(IMPORTANT: Individual sanitizing wipes to wipe down a pew is not a substitute for, but is in addition to sanitizing cleaning that must be carried out by the Parish before and/or after every Liturgy)		
Written Materials	Yes	No
Have ensured that individual Sunday bulletins not be distributed at the service, unless they are handed out individually by a glove-wearing usher/greeter, who is masked and remains at arm's length?	✓	
Have you arranged for all paper and other loose printed items to be removed from the foyer or vestibule or all public areas of the church?	✓	
Have you arranged for all hymnals, missals, pew cards, and other loose items in the pews to be removed, in order to avoid multiple parishioners handling these items and to facilitate cleaning?	✓	
Have you arranged to have "collection points", such as boxes under the supervision of an usher/greeter, to be provided for the faithful where they can deposit their offerings?	✓	
Choir	Yes	No
Have you advised parishioners that there will be no choir?	✓	
Have you arranged for the Choir Director and/or the Cantor to be present to sing their respective parts of the Liturgy as long as they practice social distancing?	✓	
Liturgical Considerations - Generally	Yes	No
Have you advised parishioners that Holy Water fonts will not be in use during the reopening phase?	✓	
Have you advised parishioners that there is to be no physical touching (kissing, hand, or forehead) of icons or relics by the faithful?	✓	
Have you advised parishioners that veneration must be by a deep and reverent bow preferably at a two-meter distance?	✓	
Have you arranged to place tape on the floor to indicate proper two-meter spacing between persons in areas where the faithful might stand in line (for example, waiting to venerate an icon or cross, or holding communal candles)?	✓	
If there is to be holding of communal candles, have you arranged to reduce the number of parishioners holding candles in order to adhere to social distancing guidelines?	✓	

Have you arranged for communal candles to be cleaned and sanitized after use?	✓	
Confession and Communion		
	Yes	No
Have you advised parishioners that there will be no confession or communion practiced by parishioners until further instructions are received from the Holy Synod by the Metropolitan?	✓	
IMPORTANT: If there is a failure by attendees to adhere to and follow the communicated and posted rules, will result in the further closure of the church and a further suspension of in-person Liturgical services. Remember, it only takes one bad apple to ruin it for everyone else. Have you advised parishioners that a failure by attendees to adhere to and follow the communicated and posted rules will result in the further closure of the church and a further suspension of in-person Liturgical services?		