

June 20, 2020

Dear Parishioners:

These past months have been unlike any others in our lifetime. The Covid-19 pandemic has turned our lives up-side-down. Most of us have had time to think about, examine, evaluate and pray as to what is really important in our lives. Many have spent more time with family members (including young adults who have returned home) than ever before. It has been enlightening!

Our church family has not been able to gather since our last Divine Liturgy on March 8<sup>th</sup>. We journeyed through Great Lent, Pascha, Ascension and most recently Pentecost (50 days after Pascha!) We have had the opportunity to view live-stream services – but it is definitely not like being in church! We have also have been having *Zoom Coffee Hour with Father Dennis* on Sundays at 12:00pm. These get togethers have been wonderful. They have allowed us to listen to and discuss the Gospel lesson and to stay in touch with our brothers and sisters at St. John.

On top of the pandemic, our great country has been grappling with numerous protests over the murder of an African American man at the hands of a police officer. This incident, once again brought to the forefront the treatment of people of color by some members of our nation’s police departments. At first, the protests were followed by looting in a number of cities across the nation -Philadelphia included. Thankfully, after the first week the looting has subsided. The protests – here in Philadelphia as well as across the country- continue but are, for the most part very peaceful.

The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America issued a statement which included the following:

*“We categorically reject racism in any form. Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27), and was created to exist (Wisdom of Solomon 1:14). We are all, each of us, “one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).” As such, there should be no hatred, no enmity, no hostility between us, but reconciliation.*

Your Parish Council completely agrees with the statement issued by the Holy Synod of Bishops.

Our little church, St. John Chrysostom, is just a few blocks where many of the protests and looting incidents occurred in Philadelphia. Fortunately, our church was not damaged in any way.

Additionally, Parish Council has been notified of a couple of people related to our parishioners who have contracted the Covid-19 virus. We Thank God they have recovered.

On June 19<sup>th</sup> Parish Council meet via Zoom. Our discussion revolved around the proposed reopening of St. John Chrysostom. The items we discussed are listed on the pages that follow.

- 1) We will re-open to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at St. John Chrysostom Church on Sunday, **July 12<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 am.**
- 2) A sign-up sheet for those wanting to attend will be online (a link will be provided) or you may call 609-685-1651 to indicate you plan to attend the Liturgy. If more people want to attend than can be acceptably accommodated (according to the City of Philadelphia guidelines) we will contact those who signed up last to inform them we are at capacity. They will be offered the first spots on the list for the next week, if they are able to attend. Please make every effort to arrive before 10:00 am so that we can assure everyone is seated so as to maintain social distancing. We will also be Live-streaming the Divine Liturgy via YouTube.
- 3) Arrangements can be made if a family would like to have a Memorial Service. Please email [info@stjohnsphila.org](mailto:info@stjohnsphila.org) or call 609-685-1651. Families with a scheduled Memorial will be placed at the top of the attendance list.
- 4) Father Dennis will serve along with one Altar server (a schedule for the altar servers will be made)
- 5) All in attendance will be required to wear a facemask while inside the church and as they approach the church. (we have facemasks on hand in case the parishioner forgets to bring his/her facemask). The wearing of face masks for children between the ages of 2 and 5 will at the discretion of their parents. Children under the age of 2 will not be required to wear a face mask.
- 6) A designated person will be stationed outside the front door to screen/take the temperature of those entering the church. Parishioners are encouraged to take their own temperatures before leaving their home in the morning. Anyone with a temperature above 100.4° should not come to church.
- 7) A designated person will be at the candle stand with a preprinted list of those who signed up to attend to confirm the attendance (information will be used for contact tracing if necessary). The list will be compiled using the information from those who signed up on line or who called to indicate they would be attending. As we begin our re-opening process please do not “just come to church”. We must know the names of those attending so we can keep a proper count in order to maintain social distancing.
- 8) Parishioners will be able to purchase and light candles. The candles can be prepaid on our website. Parish council will be available to light prepaid candles for parishioners who are unable to attend. Plastic gloves will be available for you to use to pick-up and light the

candles. Please bring exact change for the cash purchase of candles; thin candles are \$1.00 and thick candles are \$2.00 each.

- 9) Laminated prayer cards will be available at the candles stand and the parishioners will take them when they leave. All Liturgy Books and prayer cards have been removed from the back of the pews.
- 10) Venerate the Icon but do not kiss the Icon or the stand. Do not kiss or hug anyone – social distancing will be practiced. Designated places to sit will be clearly marked in the pews. Families will sit together.
- 11) Father Dennis will explain how parishioners, who choose to, will receive communion. If a parishioner does not feel comfortable receiving communion at this time they may - without any guilt or judgement by others – refrain from receiving communion.
- 12) The choir will relocate to the front of the church - where they stand during Pre-sanctified liturgy. Choir Director, Vlad Melnik, will coordinate the choir participation.
- 13) The collection basket will no longer be passed. A basket will be available at the back of the church to make a donation if you wish.
- 14) The Church will be cleaned and disinfected prior to the Sunday Liturgy. The bathrooms will be available for those in attendance. Reminder - **Wash Your Hands**. Hand sanitizer is available as you enter and exit the church.
- 15) There will be no coffee hour following Liturgy. For those of you wishing to engage in conversation with your fellow parishioners, you may do so on the sidewalk or driveway so long as both parties agree, masks are worn and social distancing is maintained. The no coffee hour policy will be in effect through September.
- 16) If someone who had been at the Divine Liturgy becomes ill, we will be required to close the church for 2 weeks. We will also be required to adhere to the City of Philadelphia established protocol and report all Covid-19 diagnoses to the Board of Health.
- 17) Those individuals considered to be at risk are encouraged to protect their health by staying at home. Metropolitan Tikhon and Father Dennis assure you this is fine in the eyes of the church. Your health is of paramount importance.

*Your Parish Council, Linda Biando, Donna Dimitri, Sergio Georgi, Wes Hanson, Fiori Papa, Nilda Salavachi, Elena Shomos*