



## St. Gregory the Theologian Greek Orthodox Church

June 3, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

With the blessings of Metropolitan Methodios, and abiding by all State and local governmental directives regarding the reopening of Churches and all Houses of Worship, your clergy and Parish Council have been diligently planning for the day our parish will once again be open to our stewards, families, and friends. We are pleased to announce that we are reopening our initial phase of in-person services on Sunday, June 7th. Over time we will transition to our pre-COVID-19 full participation levels in our worship services. We rejoice in this good news, and we give thanks to God, and to you, for all your prayers and support throughout this unprecedented period.

In these challenging times, the best charity we can give to one another is to do no harm. As we reopen we must be very considerate of one another and watchful to ensure—within reason, the safest possible environment for our worshipers and our guests. As a result, there will be certain directives that must be implemented and followed to assure the safest possible environment for the faithful to worship, partake of the Holy Sacraments and reconnect with fellow parishioners from a safe distance.

Christ's Church has existed through persecution, plagues, infectious diseases, world wars, terrorist attacks, and other periods of challenge and concern. The Church and this community stand as a symbol of faith. The Church is the place where we come together as a community to pray, receive the sacraments and be in fellowship with one another. In this time, and because of the unpredictable nature of this insidious virus, there are directives, rules, and limitations, which we must accept in order to re-open and resume our liturgical practices in the safest possible way. These are rules—not suggestions—that we must follow. We ask that each person understand and follow the directives listed below.

### **Reopening Safety Measures**

**Live streaming:** Our services will continue to be “live-streamed” as they were prior to the pandemic. Continued participation via “live-streaming” is encouraged and remains the safest way to participate in our services. Please visit: <https://www.facebook.com/saintgregorythetheologian>

**In Person Attendance:** For those of you who freely choose to attend, please note and adhere strictly to the following guidelines for everyone's safety and protection (pre-registration is required, see below):

- **Do not attend** if you are sick or do not feel well in **any way**, and/or are exhibiting any of the following symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell), or have potentially been exposed to someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19.
- **If you do not feel well--in anyway whatsoever--do not come to Church.** Do not assume that you have an allergy, a common cold, or just a sniffle.
- If you are 65 years of age or older and if you have underlying health conditions, especially asthma, diabetes, hypertension, undergoing chemotherapy, **or any age with known underlying conditions**, *you should stay home and continue to participate in the services via our Live Stream.*
- If you are 65 years of age or older without known underlying health issues, we recommend that you consider staying home, participating in the services via our Live Stream.
- If you or anyone in your household have been exposed to anyone with a confirmed COVID-19 test you **must not attend** for at least 14 days.
- By all means, make “prudent decisions” about your health and risk status: Be safe for your sake, for your family's sake, for the sake of the community, for the sake of our neighbors, and for the sake of society!
- **Attestation: By entering the Parish, you are self-certifying that you:**
  - Have no signs of a fever or a measured temperature above 100.4 degrees or greater, a cough, sore throat, or shortness of breath / trouble breathing in the last 24 hours
  - Have not had “close contact” with an individual diagnosed with COVID-19. “Close contact” includes living in the same household, caring for a person with COVID-19, being within 6 feet of someone with COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more, or coming into direct contact with secretions (shared utensils, coughed on) from a person with COVID-19.
  - Have not been asked to self-isolate or quarantine by a doctor or local health official

- **Attend at your own risk:** Although we have adopted safety measures to mitigate the risk of contracting COVID-19, your attendance may result in exposure to COVID-19, so please understand this risk prior to making a decision to return to in-person services.

#### **Pre-Arrival and Arrival at Church:**

- **Occupancy:** The Parish Council shall monitor the number of attendees entering the place of worship to ensure compliance with the maximum occupancy level and social distancing guidelines. Our sanctuary limit will be set at 50 until further notice (note this is significantly less than the maximum allowed 40% occupancy level per State guidelines). This number includes everyone in the church: the priest/s, chanters, ushers, parish council members, and congregation.
- **Pre-registration is required** each week to ensure that our occupancy limit is not exceeded as well as for contact tracing, should it become necessary. The full name and phone number of everyone in attendance is required to be collected prior to admittance and will be required via a pre-registration process. Pre-register each week by clicking the following link: <https://www.signup.com/go/znPbsuz>
- - If you are not able to register via this link, please call the church office at (508) 337-9986 and leave your name and phone number by Saturday at noon of each week.
  - **To ensure a spot/s you must pre-register each week.**
  - This letter/link will be available each week in our Wednesday email.
- **Face Coverings:** All attendees **must** wear face coverings or masks in accordance with COVID-19 practices while inside and while entering and exiting places of worship or otherwise participating in in-person services, except where a person is unable to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or disabling condition. Also parish priest/s and chanters will not wear masks while in the Altar or on the Solea. Parish Priest/s will wear a mask while offering communion. Attendees must bring their own masks.
  - For children between age 2 and 5, the wearing of a face covering or mask is at the discretion of the child's parent or guardian. Children under the age of 2 should not wear a face covering or mask
  - **We may deny entry to persons who refuse to wear a face covering or mask for non-medical reasons (and if you decide to attend with medical conditions that result in you not being able to wear a face mask, we ask that you please prayerfully revisit your decision and the "prudent decision bullet above).**
- **Ventilation** will be maximized as possible (doors and windows will be open as possible / HVAC enhancements).

#### **Social Distancing**

Attendees who are not part of the same immediate household must be seated at least 6 feet apart. Members of the same immediate household are permitted to sit together and less than 6 feet apart. Social distancing should be maintained at all times. The floors and pews have been marked to help with this. *Ushers will be present to assist with seating and appropriate distancing.*

**Holy Communion** will be administered in accordance with His Eminence's instructions as outlined below:

- His Eminence has instructed the faithful to tilt our heads back as able and open our mouths widely so that the priest can drop the Holy Communion in without closing our mouths on the spoon.
- The line should form for Holy Communion in the aisle only when directed by ushers and with proper social distancing measures in place.
- If you are not receiving, please step into the aisle to allow others receiving in your row to pass by you safely.
- Our priest/s will wear a mask while offering Holy Communion. Communicants are to remove their masks when receiving only.
- Faithful should not wipe our lips/mouth on the communion cloth.
- No veneration of Priest's hand until further notice.
- Following Holy Communion, the faithful will return to the pews by the proper one-way aisles only.
- Individuals at higher risk or otherwise not comfortable attending services or receiving communion at this time, may make an appointment with Father to receive communion.
- If you have any concerns at all, we recommend that you simply refrain from receiving.

#### **Exiting the Church:**

- At the conclusion of the Liturgy please exit as directed by the ushers, row by row, maintaining social distance.

- There will be no fellowship hour following services.
- Congregants are asked to immediately leave the building and not to congregate with those outside of their families in the church, narthex, or on the premises.
- Antidoron will be made available in individual plastic bags as you exit at the conclusion of Liturgy.

**Other measures:**

- **Altar Acolytes** will not be permitted to serve until further notice.
- **Candles**: Please follow directions for lighting to maintain guidelines. Seven-day candles will be available and placed by an usher after services are concluded.
- **Chanters**: A maximum of 2 chanters will chant until further notice. They will be located directly in front of the Iconostasis, socially distant from the congregation, on opposite sides of the Iconostasis. Chanters will not be wearing masks while chanting.
- **Cleaning**: According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), St. Gregory's will be cleaned and disinfected between each service, including disinfection of heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, bathrooms, microphones, shared instruments). Deep cleaning and disinfecting consistent with the CDC guidance will occur if an individual with COVID-19 attended a service or otherwise entered our church.
- **Case Notification**: If we learn that anyone who tested positive for COVID-19 has been in our building we will notify the local Board of Health in Mansfield and assist and reach as reasonably requested to trace likely contacts and advise contacts to isolate and self-quarantine.
- **Congregational singing** will be discontinued until further notice.
- **Contributions**: St. Gregory's will no longer pass trays. Faithful are encouraged to continue their stewardship and total giving (trays, candle, other) via bill pay, Give+, or mailing a check. A basket will also continue to be present in the Narthex for all giving. No change will be available, please come prepared accordingly.
- **Coffee Hour**: We will hold our virtual coffee hour (only) in this initial reopening phase at a new time: **11:30**.
- **Sacraments/other services**: All safety policies apply. Specific arrangements must be made/reviewed with Father and PC officers.
- **Service books** will not be available until further notice.
- **Sunday bulletins** will be provided electronically prior to services.
- **Sunday School** will not be held until further notice.
- **Weekday services** will be online only during this phase of reopening.
- **Hand washing**: Access to handwashing facilities, including soap and running water will remain available.
- **Hand sanitizer** will be made available and should be applied upon entry.
- **Icons** to be venerated by bowing only.

The foregoing rules for attending Liturgy and other services at our Church were derived from State directives, local guidelines, and the direction and guidance of His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios. Our collective intent is to assure all our stewards, their families and our many friends, a safe and comforting experience in the Household of God. We want to see you, we want to pray with you, but above all, we want you all to be safe, healthy and able to worship in a manner that is best for our entire Parish. **We praise God that we will reopen June 7<sup>th</sup> which is Pentecost (Trinity Sunday) when we celebrate the establishment of Christ's Church upon the earth for the salvation of the world!**

May God continue to bless you and your families and keep you safe!

Gratefully and Joyfully yours in our Risen Lord,



Parish Priest



Parish Council President