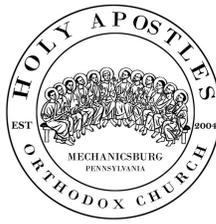


Holy Apostles Orthodox Church
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**A Mission Parish of the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania
The Orthodox Church in America**

Great Lent, 2021

Dear Faithful of Holy Apostles Church,

Glory to Jesus Christ!

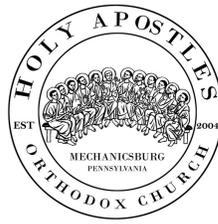
As we approach the end of Great Lent, I wanted to send an update to the parish and share some of our revised protocols and plans for the future of our parish community. All of these are with the blessing of His Eminence, our Archbishop Mark.

First, we had a committee of Council and Non-Council members who helped develop a metric by which to assess how and when we will have the Church operate at a “normal” level. I am thankful for their input and support. We have been slowly opening things back up with limited fellowship opportunities after Sunday and Wednesday evening Liturgies. We have a plan in motion for Pascha, with a change in the seating arrangement, and for the blessing of baskets with a slightly modified Agape Meal.

Given the decrease in case numbers in our county since January, and the availability of the vaccine, the Parish Council and I have decided the following:

1. Because of the availability of the COVID vaccine to everyone by late April, we will allow time for those who desire to get it to do so, and the prescribed timing that it requires. On April 19, the vaccine will be available for everyone in Pennsylvania, so based on this we decided on a two-month window to give people the opportunity to get it, if desired. From that point we would then return to a sense of normalcy (June 20). I know many already have received it, and others plan to when it is available. As the Archbishop directed, it is a private decision, and no one will be judged either way. I do not think anyone is morally superior if you get it, and I do not think anyone is spiritually superior if you do not get it. Simply put: “You do you,” and respect your neighbor without judging them.
2. On Palm Sunday, the red chairs will return to the Church, still spaced out. We will put the Icon stands and candle stands back to their usual position and will reinstate the veneration of the Cross at the end of Eucharistic services. If someone is not comfortable kissing the cross, Father will simply bless you with it and (gently!) touch your head.
3. On Pascha, please be mindful of who is comfortable with the Paschal greeting. Again, please respect everyone’s choice and personal space. Baskets will be blessed after Liturgy OUTSIDE on the front sidewalk (weather permitting). Please keep them in your cars until after the service. After the blessing those who wish to depart, may do so, and those who would like to stay for the Agape meal can use the hall and a tent that we will be renting with set up tables and chairs. **Of course, those who stay we would ask your help in setting up after services and cleaning up after the Agape Meal.**
4. On Pentecost Sunday (6/20), all the red chairs will be returned to the Church as was normal before the pandemic. Fellowship Hour will continue with decreased restrictions. We

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encourage everyone to take advantage of the beautiful weather and take your food and drinks outside, even now. The picnic tables and fire pit benches have been set up for this purpose. **Please, we just ask that people clean up after themselves and make sure trash gets to the designated receptacles.**

Also, because of the availability of the COVID vaccine, and other positive changes with CDC requirements, if anyone in the parish informs me that they are COVID positive, and were in Church the previous weekend, we will notify the parish of this, ask everyone to monitor themselves for any symptoms, but not shut down the parish (as was the procedure previously). Parishioners can then make their own decision to attend or not accordingly. Again, if you are not feeling well, please stay home (that is a general rule, normally...)

Until Pentecost, barring any major change in the situation, we will continue to follow the Sunday alphabetical groupings (A – L & M – Y) giving everyone who wants to attend the ability to do so, being fair. We will also continue to have the 1st Saturday of the month reserved for those whose work requires them to not be around crowds and insists on masks, etc. This gives our whole community the opportunity to receive the Holy Mysteries, which is my priority in all of this. I will speak to those folks who frequent that service and will assess the need to continue going forward after June. I am thankful for the singers and servers who selflessly give their time for these extra services.

To those who think we are doing too much: I am sorry. To those who think we are not doing enough: I am sorry. As I have said consistently through this, we will try to maintain a balance. I feel this plan is a logical and safe way to move forward. This past year has not been easy. Maintaining a parish under these circumstances with directives from our hierarchs, expectations from the civil authorities, and assessing the needs of the community, has been some of the hardest things I have had to do in the 16 years of my ministry at Holy Apostles. However, the good nature and kind spirit of our people has been a continued blessing, and for your charity and patience I am grateful. This will end. I believe this is ending. May God hasten the day as we move towards our goal, being a stronger parish family as a result.

Asking your prayers, and thankful for your understanding, and support,

With much love & God's blessing,

Fr. Timothy E. Hojnicky
Rector, Holy Apostles Orthodox Church