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Subject: Re-Opening Our Cathedral

Date: Fri, May 8, 2020 9:09 am

Attachments:

Re-Opening Our Cathedral

Dear Faithful of Saint John's,

I am so glad that the time has come that we can begin to re-open the Cathedral and that we have reached this point safely. I am proud of what our local community and our state has accomplished in "flattening the curve" of the coronavirus spread and we all pray the good news keeps on coming.

Last week the Governor of Alaska issued a mandate that allowed for small gatherings within Churches. On Wednesday, our Metropolitan Joseph issued directives that coincides with this mandate and gives us further guidelines to follow, allowing adjustments in each local community as appropriate. Yesterday, Fr. Tom and I participated in a Zoom meeting with His Eminence along with over a hundred priests from around the country. Below is an outline of what Saint John's will begin after this weekend.

1. First of all, it will be our greatest priority to continue to keep all our people safe from the coronavirus as best we can. Let us continue to pray to God for His help.

2. Beginning next week, we will serve three Divine Liturgies each week. Each of these Liturgies will be served by a team of one priest, one deacon, and two chanters. Sixteen additional people will be allowed to join each of these Liturgies so that the total gathering is twenty persons. We will observe this twenty person limit at each Liturgy for throughout May, and if all is going well, we will seek a blessing from Metropolitan Joseph to increase the size of the gathering to match what the local, civil mandates allow. For us this means we will not move right away to the new maximum of fifty persons, but will begin and stay with smaller groups of twenty for a while. Children who are held by their parents do not need to be signed up or count as one of the sixteen. Older children should be signed up.

3. The way we will assign people to each Liturgy is to ask the members of our parish (including catechumens) to sign up to be in a "Divine Liturgy Group." This sign up will be done online at a link provided to everyone below. Each Group will have a maximum of sixteen people at this time, so that along with the four-member team the number gathering will be a total of twenty. We will make as many Groups as we need to allow everyone who desires to do so, to attend Liturgy. The online sign up is available here: [Divine Liturgy Group Sign Up](#)



4. Three Liturgies will be held each week at these times:
 - a. Wednesday evening at 6:15pm
 - b. Saturday morning at 9:15am
 - c. Sunday morning at 10am
 - i. Sunday Matins will begin beforehand at 9:30am. We have made adjustments from last week to keep our abbreviated Matins closer to 30 minutes. Those who attend on Sunday are encouraged to come for Matins.
 - ii. We will also have Saturday Vespers at 7:15pm. This time change from 6:15pm to 7:15pm will begin Saturday, May 16 to better accommodate summer hours. Whichever “Divine Liturgy Group” is assigned to Sunday morning, that Group will also be able to attend Vespers on Saturday night. Confession will also be available after Saturday Vespers for the people in the attending Group.
5. The Sunday morning Matins and Divine Liturgy (and also Saturday Vespers) will continue to be livestreamed every weekend. The weekday Liturgies will not be livestreamed, but will be a simple Liturgy with the gathering of just those assigned for that service. The weekday Liturgies should last just a little over an hour. Those receiving Communion on Wednesday evening should fast from the midday meal on.
6. Each household should sign up to belong to one “Divine Liturgy Group.” These Groups will then be assigned on a rotating schedule to attend one of the weekly Liturgies. This schedule will be posted on the Cathedral website to show what day/date/time each Group is assigned to one of the Liturgies. You do not choose the Liturgy you want to attend. Rather the Groups will rotate through the different Liturgy days, so that each group will cycle through every Liturgy day, including Sunday morning. The schedule can be found on the Cathedral website under the “Services” menu.
7. You do not have to sign up for one of these Groups if you do not feel comfortable to be part of a gathering at this point. Signing up for a “Divine Liturgy Group” is voluntary.
8. By having these smaller “Divine Liturgy Groups” we can begin to worship together again and to receive Communion. If it turns out that there are nine Groups, each with sixteen people (a total of 144 persons), then each of these Groups would be able to receive Communion once every three weeks. If it turns out there are more groups than nine, then Communion would be less frequent. But as we are allowed to gather in larger groups, Communion will become more frequent. Let us hope this happens soon.
9. In the Divine Liturgy Group sign up you will see that there are three marked “strict.” This means these Groups should be for people who may be more concerned about being exposed to a gathering and want to be in a Group of people that will more strictly follow the guidelines for safe, social distancing. These strict Groups would probably not be appropriate for children.
10. If you or your household are unable to attend on your assigned day, you can on your own, try to find someone in another group to trade with for that occasion. Please keep the same number in each group.
11. During these weekly Liturgies our Metropolitan has asked that we follow the guidelines with

which we have already become familiar.

- a. Most importantly, if you have a fever or a cough or any other symptom that might indicate potential coronavirus infection, please do not attend Liturgy, and consider getting tested.
- b. Social-Distancing of 6 feet must be maintained at all times. The chairs in the Nave will help designate different areas. Members of the same household can stand close together. The wings on each side might be a good place for families with children.
- c. Hand sanitizer will be available in the Narthex to use as needed. You can also bring your own.
- d. Masks are “highly encouraged.” The point of wearing a mask is, as we have learned, to protect others even more than oneself. It is an act of self-sacrifice and care for the other person. For the Groups marked “strict,” wearing a mask is required. (If you need a cloth mask, they can be purchased in Eagle River at “Stitch in Time” sewing shop down from Jitters.

12. If you are uncomfortable signing up for one of these Divine Liturgy Groups or have a special reason to ask for Communion sooner than your Group might be scheduled, you can call or email Fr. Marc (frmarcd@aol.com) and a time can be arranged. You can also arrange a time with your priest to have Confession if you desire. This can be done in person in the Church, but the Absolution will be given without the stole over your head so that appropriate distance can be maintained.

13. Finally, the Church is now open during the day for people to come in for personal prayer and quiet sitting. There should be no more than ten people in the Church at a time, and please observe the usual safety guidelines outlined in 11 above.

I know that this is far from full restoration to the gathering, the worship, and the Communion to which we are accustomed, but it is what we can do for now. Very soon we will also schedule a time for other sacramental services, such as the Prayers of Naming and Baptism for Elijah Armstrong, and also the Chrismation of our catechumens. As in every time of struggle, there is something valuable we can learn. It is not impossible that we will look back on some aspects of this time providing a blessing we might not otherwise have never known.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Marc