

March 4, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Yesterday, His Eminence Archbishop BENJAMIN released a letter to the clergy, monastics, and faithful of the Diocese of the West concerning adaptations to the covid-19 protocols currently in place in the Diocese of the West. See the full text of the letter below.

Please be aware that the use of masks, social distancing, sanitizing, etc., remains in place. However, the main points in His Eminence's letter include some positive changes, as noted below. *My additional comments are italicized.*

- Icons may be venerated in the customary manner; the people should be advised to be attentive to their own health when doing so, e.g., people with coughs or colds should refrain from kissing the icons as they would refrain from doing at the time of any illness. *(If you are nervous about kissing the icons at present, please continue to venerate them as you have been doing.)*
- Coffee/fellowship hours may be held, provided they take place outdoors, and that the other usual procedures are maintained, e.g., social distancing is observed. *(We will have outdoor coffee hour on a regular basis, weather permitting, beginning March 14, Cheesefare Sunday.)*
- I reiterate that the use of one Communion spoon has already been blessed. Those whose communities have been using multiple spoons are blessed to continue this practice until further notice.
- Collection baskets may be passed. *(We will reinstate this on Sunday.)*
- Service materials, e.g., service and prayer books, may now be placed for the use of the faithful, provided they are regularly sanitized. *(We will inventory out supply of service books, sanitize them, and place them in the pews in the near future.)*
- Forgiveness Vespers should be served as usual, while observing all current safety protocols, but without the direct personal exchange of the kiss of peace. The priest will ask forgiveness of the congregation from the amvon. The faithful will respond from their places.
- Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers should be served in each parish separately, either directly after the Divine Liturgy or on Sunday evening, while observing all current safety protocols.
- The Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts should be served as usual, while observing all current health protocols.

I am grateful to His Eminence for his archpastoral concern for all the parishes and communities of the Diocese of the West throughout the past year, a concern that continues to be shown daily. I am also grateful to all of you, the clergy and faithful of Saints Peter and Paul Church. Be assured that we will continue to remain vigilant in protecting the health and well being of all our parish community. Your patience, understanding, and forbearance have made the challenges of these difficult times easier to face.

With love in the Lord,

+Bishop Daniel