

Christ is risen!

We are in a “phased reopening” of our beloved Church of Saint James. This will inevitably be a process of “trial and error,” and what makes sense for one might not jive for another. This is understandable. Please, let us extend grace and understanding, and freely forgive as Christ has forgiven us.

The reopening will be in a context of prudent consideration for the safety of those we love: others in the Church with us, as well as those we encounter in our daily lives. My goals are (in no particular order) (a) to safely bring as many people into the Church as soon as possible for the sacraments of the Church, (b) to continue to stream services for those unable to attend the services for whatever reason, (c) to make myself available for sacramental ministry, prayer and counseling, and (d) to obey our God-blessed authorities, both ecclesial and governmental.

If you are ill, or if you have been directly exposed to someone who has “the virus,” please refrain from entering the Church until an appropriate time has passed. If you are in need of visitation during that time, please contact me without hesitation. If you do test positive for “the virus” (God forbid!), please promptly let me know and I will discreetly inform the Parish without revealing your name (e.g., “someone who was at the Wednesday morning Liturgy has tested positive”). We will be keeping an attendance roster at each service, so we can also let potentially-exposed individuals know directly. We will not reveal your name unless required to do so.

We are blessed to hold weekday services (Liturgies and other services) in addition to the weekend “resurrectional cycle.” We are blessed to further open the Church for private prayer, confession and individual communion from the Reserved Sacrament. These can happen at any time (based on schedules), and are arranged by appointment. Please call me directly to arrange for a time. See below for details.

For services on our Church calendar, (i) **please contact me to let me know you are coming**, so we can be sure we can accommodate everyone – we don’t want to have to turn people away; and (ii) **please observe the following standards**. These are for our safety and health. They are not based in fear, but in an exercise of God-given prudence and discretion. Just like we look both ways before crossing the street (even though we know God can protect us), we take reasonable precaution at our services.

In loving attention to the safety of ourselves and others, everyone in the Church except the “staff”

1. must enter and exit from the front door only,
2. must be directed to specific pews and must remain in those pews except to receive communion,
3. must observe social distancing except from immediate family members,
4. must refrain from touching others except their own family members,
5. must touch as little furniture and other items as possible and refrain from kissing icons and other objects (the “small bow” and reverence is acceptable and encouraged),
6. must remain in the sanctuary unless absolutely necessary to use the toilet, and
7. must have a mask and wear it at all times, except for
 - a. the priest, who will not be masked while serving,
 - b. the chanters, who may remove their masks (if needed) while singing,
 - c. small children and others who cannot wear a mask (more on that below), and
 - d. during communion.

Children must remain in the pew with their parents. If that is a concern, please bring your children to an “individual or single-family-only” service. If you or someone in your family is unable to wear a mask for an entire service, please avail yourselves of one of those opportunities. More on that below.

INDIVIDUAL OR SINGLE-FAMILY-ONLY SERVICES

If you are unable to attend the broader “parish attendance” service, please consider a more focused service. I can serve a Typica service and administer communion (the “reserved sacrament”) in about 20 minutes for an individual or single family. Please call, text or email to arrange a time, even a regular, weekly “appointment.” I am available at 7 most weeknights, all day Friday, and Saturday until about 3.

This is the ideal service for children who get squirmy – they are not expected to be as still as long, and will have more freedom in this context to move about the Church, within prudent limits. They will still need governance, since our sanitizing can only do so much, but there will not be as much concern about immediate contact. This is also perfect for others who cannot wear a mask.

Everyone attending one of these services must enter and exit using the front door; for their own health and the health of others will be expected to be masked as much as possible and to touch as little as possible; and must remain in the sanctuary until the end of the service.

JOY-FILLED OBEDIENCE; NO FEAR

I’m sorry if this sounds domineering or overbearing. These are the directives I have received from Sayidna Joseph and Sayidna Thomas – and from Governor Hogan. I want to be clear, so there is no consternation when people arrive for services. We have already had one situation where the person arriving had a different expectation than the rest of us, and that did not end well. I do not want a repetition.

The Archdiocese is very clear, as is our State government, that we need to observe these norms in order to preserve life and health. Those who rule us might sometimes be ill-advised in their actions, but we are commanded, for our own well-being and the flourishing of our own soul, except in extreme situations (of which this is not one) to pray for (not against) and obey our ecclesial government as Christ personified, and our civil government as the “minister of God to us for justice.”

Rebellion against our rightly-constituted civil and ecclesial authority, whether overt in our words or actions, or muttered or festering in our hearts, “is as the sin of witchcraft,” and cannot redound to our blessing.

We “do not have a spirit of fear, but of power and love, and of a sound mind.” This is balanced by the scriptural admonition that “the prudent see danger and hide themselves, but the simple go on, and are punished.” The steps we are taking are not fearful; I pray they are prudent and will be blessed by God.

PERSONNEL AND ATTENDANCE NUMBERS

“The Staff”: Services at Saint James may be conducted with a priest, a single altar server and up to two chanters. In addition, an usher (aka Kh. Anna) has been deputized to ease us into the “new normal.”

There will be no choir. This does not mean, of course, that no one else can sing. We held a “test” Liturgy this morning with five people, none of whom are “trained chanters,” and the singing was inspired and

delightful. God “dwells within the praises of His people,” and He takes joy in our worship, as we “make a joyful noise to him.” That’s the Saint James kids, adults, and even the trained singers and priest.

There are no applicable attendance numbers that we observe, as a practical matter, since the numbers we can receive into the Church with proper safe distancing are far less than the allowable number under any applicable standard.

RECEIVING COMMUNION AND ANTIDORON

We will continue to administer communion from a chalice with a spoon. Please receive communion as follows:

- a. Remain in your pew until released by the usher;
- b. Remove your mask as you approach the chalice, and state your name (*this is important*);
- c. Take the corner of the kalima (red cloth) nearest you and hold it under your chin (there will be no one holding it for you);
- d. Tilt your head back and open your mouth wide “like unto a baby bird”;
- e. After receiving, if you need to wipe your lips with the kalima please do so on one side of the kalima (not the corner you have been holding); but if not, please refrain;
- f. Return immediately to your pew.

Antidoron (blessed bread) will be distributed by the priest after the service. Again, please wait to approach until directed. Please take the antidoron back to your pew and either eat it there, removing your mask as little as possible, or take it with you to eat at home or outside the Church.

If you wish to receive communion at any time except during a Liturgy, please see me. I will make the reserved sacrament available after Vespers or during an individual meeting. We will probably pray the Typica (attached with this email) if you are receiving outside a “parish attendance” service. Please plan to read it ahead.

CONFESSION/RECONCILIATION

Clergy have been pointedly reminded that the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) is a healing medicament and should be applied before administering the “live coal” of the Eucharist. If you are aware upon searching your conscience of unconfessed sin, or if you know it has been a long time since you were cleansed before the icon of Christ of the stain of sin, please avail yourself of that balm. Confessions will be heard observing social distancing, and may begin on the telephone with spiritual direction culminating in absolution in the Church.

FELLOWSHIP

After the Liturgy, I usually hear a delightful sound – the sound of friends and family reuniting after long separation, laughing and exclaiming outside the Church. After services, please feel free to remain in the Church for private prayer or meditation, or to seek counseling or confession, but please take fellowship outside the Church. It’s safer and more reverent, and allows Kh. Anna to begin sanitizing the Church for the next service.

May our good God bless and keep you!