



E. No. 192
March 26, 2020

TO ALL CLERGY AND ORDAINED MONASTICS
OF THE DIOCESE OF EASTERN AMERICA
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

SUBJECT: Instructions of the Holy Synod of Bishops and directives of civil authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic relative to the instructions and directives of the Diocesan Bishop

Very Reverend, Reverend, and Venerable Fathers,

We are all, today, without exception, living witnesses to the continuous expansion of COVID-19, i.e. coronavirus in the United States and beyond. Therefore, in order to do all that is proper within our ability, we consider it necessary to address a few important issues concerning our communities and precautions that parishes must strictly apply and follow during the course of the pandemic.

As can be seen from our earlier official memos, the instructions and directives given therein are supported by the instructions of the Holy Synod of Bishops of our most holy Church, Act No. 254, of March 25, 2020, then, by the official Communiques of the Holy Synod of March 16 and 23, 2020 ([link below](#)), as well as directives issued by civil authorities.

Therefore:

1. It is impermissible for anyone to ignore, or to interpret on their own accord, a state decree limiting the number of believers who can at the same time participate in Divine Liturgies. In order avoid any confusion concerning this, it should be noted, once again, that the instruction on limiting the number of believers at worship services should not and cannot be brought under the category and criterium of ***faith***, which, whatever temptation may come before it, always remains faith in Christ, firm and steadfast. Therefore, we must not neglect the words of the Gospel which teach us, that even the limited number of those present at prayer represents fullness: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18:20).

All the instructions and directives given to our parishes, thus far, as well as forthcoming ones, are nothing other than an expression of our archpastoral concern and paternal love for the protection of all our ***faithful***. Caring for our neighbor should always, and especially in this time of pandemic, be our priority and our sacred Christian duty. The Holy Liturgy will be celebrated by the priest with the assistance of an altar server and a chanter, and only where worshippers are permitted, and only with the number determined by the local authorities. In places where the number is not specified, follow the instructions of the President of the United States, not to have more than 10 persons to the same place, subject to the regulation on physical distancing (per E. No.183 of March 19, 2020).

2. The said Act of the Holy Synod of Bishops is in full accordance with our previous instruction on communing believers (E. No. 167 of March 13, 2020), as can be seen from the following quotation of the cited Synodal Act:

“For practical reasons, as well as for the possible fear of some believers, we recommend that there be enough of the Lord's Blood each time in the Holy Chalice, and that the particles of the Lord's Body are not large, so that the communicant, opening their mouth sufficiently, can commune without being touched by the holy spoon.”

3. Also, the above Act of the Holy Synod of Bishops is in complete agreement with our previous instruction that parishes using technology for livestreaming of sacred services may do the same, except that the transmission is not to be recorded from the holy altar, nor is the communing of believers to be recorded (per E. No. 183 of March 19, 2020).

We also take this opportunity to thank those clergy who have addressed us with inquiries about possible, acceptable measures that they could implement to fulfill the *letter of the law*, so that as many communicants as possible can be embraced in the *spirit of that same law*, and that no one will be guilty of violating the same.

Since the attached Act of the Holy Synod is intended only for the hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church, we have decided, out of purely pastoral reasons, to share it with you, the clergy of the Diocese of Eastern America, for your information and not for public disclosure.

The above is for your information and, accordingly, implementation.

WITH ARCHPASTORAL BESSINGS,

BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA



Official Statements of the Holy Synod of Bishops:

- March 16, 2020: http://www.spc.rs/eng/communique_holy_synod_bishops_serbian_orthodox_church_1
- March 23, 2020: http://www.spc.rs/eng/communique_holy_synod_bishops_0