



St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church
Palos Heights, Illinois

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

COVID-19 Response Committee
Protocol and Guidelines Manual

STAFF, USHERS, and VOLUNTEERS

On May 29th we have received the blessing of His Grace Bishop ANTHONY to hold Divine Liturgies with 25 people in attendance in church, in addition to the clergy, servers, chanters, and ushers. This meets Illinois State guidelines for houses of worship published on May 28th, as well as guidelines received from the Antiochian Orthodox Cristian Archdiocese on May 29th. *We will increase attendance as we receive the blessing to do so.*

Thank God we can slowly start returning to our beloved church! We ask for your patience and prayers as we transition back, and we ask you to ***please read these instructions carefully***. Be sure to follow them to ensure your safety, and the safety and well-being of our entire community.

All staff, ushers, and volunteers must follow these guidelines, to ensure their safety, and the safety of all St. Mary's parishioners.

You must stay at home if you have recently traveled, are not feeling well or were exposed to COVID-19. If you have traveled domestically or internationally in the last 14 days, have been exposed to Covid-19 within the past 14 days, have tested positive for Covid-19, or have any of the following symptoms, please stay at home and consider coming to church at a later date if:

1. you are sick or not feeling well
2. you have a temperature of 100.3 or higher
3. you have a cough, sore throat or shortness of breath
4. you experience loss of smell or taste
5. you have body aches or muscle aches

By volunteering to usher or to assist at a church service at St. Mary's Orthodox Church of Palos Heights, you affirm that all the following are true for yourself:

- *I have not traveled domestically or internationally in the last 14 days*
- *I have not been exposed to Covid-19 within the past 14 days*
- *I have not tested positive for Covid-19*
- *I do not have any of the following symptoms: sick or not feeling well, temperature of 100.3 or higher, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath, loss of smell or taste, body aches or muscle aches*
- *If I develop any symptoms, I will not volunteer and will reschedule for a later date.*
- *I do hereby agree to indemnify, release and hold harmless St. Mary Orthodox Church of Palos Heights, IL, its clergy, staff, officers, directors, agents, attorneys and volunteers, against any claim for damages, compensation or otherwise including but not limited to, illness and all losses and expenses caused to while attending Divine Services or activities at St. Mary Orthodox Church of Palos Heights, IL.*

Stay at home if you are over 65 or have a pre-existing medical condition, as recommended by CDC, the State of Illinois, and the Antiochian Archdiocese. You are reminded to follow CDC recommendations regarding your own health. If you fall into an "at risk" category, that would be 65 years and older, or with any underlying conditions, please stay home. Please consult your doctor before you make any decisions to volunteer.

The following procedure has been implemented at St. Mary's Church for the foreseeable future:

General Guidelines

- 1. Ushers and staff must wear a mask and gloves at all times while on church property or inside the church building.**
- 2. Ushers and staff must sanitize their hands frequently, and change your gloves as needed, if they become dirty or contaminated.**
- 3. Ushers and staff must avoid touching their face and maintain social distancing at all times.**
- 4. Ushers and staff must frequently disinfect all areas and items that are touched frequently – door knobs, icons, table, hallway and narthex objects that are touched. Disinfecting wipes will be available to the ushers.**
- 5. All parishioners must register in order to attend a Divine Liturgy.**

Services

- 6. Starting May 31st and until further notice, St. Mary's can have a maximum of 25 people in attendance at a service, in addition to clergy, servers, chanters and ushers.**
- 7. St. Mary's will offer multiple Divine Liturgies every week for the next few weeks.** Please check the church calendar for the schedule.
- 8. Vespers will be live-streamed only, no attendance will be allowed at this time.**
- 9. St. Mary's members will receive an email with the registration link.** If they do not receive the link, they must email office@stmaryoc.org or call the church office at 708-239-0004, as the church may not have everyone's email address.
- 10. In order to attend Divine Liturgy, all parishioners must sign up for a specific service.** They must register so that the church does not exceed the allowed capacity.
- 11. Walk-ins will not be allowed.**

Procedure for Service Attendance

- 12. Parishioners must arrive to church early.** Church door will be open only between 8:20am – 8:40am for the beginning of Orthros, and between 9:30am – 9:55am before the beginning of Liturgy.
. Note: Orthros is on Sundays only. All other days, there is only Liturgy starting at 10:00am.
- 13. Church doors will be locked during the service, and there is no admission after doors are locked,** to ensure we do not exceed the allowed number of persons.
- 14. Everyone attending a service must wear a mask.** All those attending services must wear a mask or other face covering at all times while on church property or inside the church building, with the exception of children under 2 years old.
 - Please be aware that people with certain medical conditions or disabilities may need to take their masks off at times. If you see someone without a mask, please remind them that they should put their mask on, and maintain social distance (at least 6 feet) from everyone not in their immediate family.
- 15. All parishioners are asked to park in the back parking lot.** Please park in the large parking lot behind the church (North side of the church building).
- 16. The only open entrance into the church will be the ramp from the parking lot.** All other doors are locked, and no one can access any other doors (locks were changed and key fobs have been deactivated for the short term).
- 17. Parishioners are asked to maintain at least 6 feet distance when walking up the ramp.** If multiple families arrive at the same time, please ask them to follow the markings on the ramp and maintain social distance.
- 18. Parishioners should not walk in the opposite direction on the ramp.** If someone is already on the ramp and needs to go back, they should not walk down the ramp if someone is walking up the ramp. They must ensure the ramp is clear **before going down the ramp.**
- 19. During the times the door is open before a service, please keep the door open** (if weather permits) to avoid people touching door handles. Otherwise, please pay attention when people walk up the ramp, and open the door for them.

Check-in, Screening, Candles and Donations

- 20. An usher will verify if parishioners pre-registered.** Ushers will receive a log with the names of everyone who has registered for that service. The registration cannot be transferred to another person. Only those on the list will be allowed to enter. We must do this to ensure we do not exceed the allowed capacity, for your safety and the safety of everyone else.
- 21. The usher will direct the parishioners to the sanitizing station.** Upon entering the church and checking in, all parishioners must stop at the sanitizing station to sanitize their hands. A sanitizing station will be set up right by the ramp door, and an additional station will be placed in the narthex.
- 22. An usher will check each person's temperature using a touchless, no contact thermometer.** The usher must wear a mask and gloves, and sanitize their hands frequently. If anyone has a temperature of 100.3 or higher, usher will ask the parishioner to go home and return to church at a future date.
- 23. Usher will ask each person the following questions,** to ensure those in attendance do not have any symptoms that indicate potential illness. Questions can be asked in English or Arabic.
- Have you traveled domestically or internationally in the last 14 days?
 - Have you been in contact with anyone diagnosed with Covid-19 within the past 14 days, or have you have tested positive for Covid-19?
 - Are you sick or not feeling well?
 - Do you have a temperature of 100.3 or higher, or are you taking any fever-reducing medication?
 - Do you have a cough, sore throat or shortness of breath?
 - Have you experienced loss of smell or taste?
 - Do you have body aches or muscle aches?

If a person answered YES to any of the questions above, usher will kindly ask the person to go home, and come back to church at a later date, for the safety and well-being of all those in attendance.

- 21. Ushers will instruct all attendees to follow all signs, markings, and directions of the ushers and staff at all times.** There will be markings on the ground and signs throughout the facility to remind people to maintain social distancing.
- 22. Ushers must ensure nobody goes into the restricted areas of the building.** Everyone must enter and exit through the ramp door on the North side of the building. ***The lower level, West entrance, East side of the building (Sunday School, Gym, Nadi, Bookstore area) are all off-limits at the present time, and signs and tape are placed accordingly.***
- 23. Candles will be available. Ushers must place candles in upright position in a jar,** and spread them out, to allow people to take a candle without touching other

candles. Please refill the jar as needed. Instruct the people to only touch the candles you will be lighting.

- 24. Ushers will instruct attendees to place their weekly donation and candle donations into the donation box.** Remind them they can make their donations online prior to attending the service (link for candles and online donations is posted on the church Facebook page and emailed out weekly).
- 25. Parishioners are instructed not to kiss any icons.** People may venerate them by bowing in front of them, but not kissing or touching the icons. Ushers or maintenance staff must be prepared to disinfect icons very frequently with disinfectant wipes, if people kiss or touch them.
- 26. There will not be any books or bulletins.** Parishioners are asked to view the bulletin online before attending the service.
- 27. Remind people to follow social distancing (at least 6 feet) at all times.**

Seat Assignments, Communion and Dismissal

- 28. Ushers must direct people to their assigned seating. Chairs will be set up in church according to the people that registered for that service. Immediate family members (husband/wife and children) will sit together.** People will have assigned seats. Attendees should not move their chairs.
- 29. There will be no Sunday School or coffee hour until further notice.** Everyone must avoid congregating in the church, narthex, or church parking lot, and must leave the church building immediately after the service.
- 30. Holy Communion will be given after the livestream has ended.** Ushers must direct participants to communion, one family at a time, while maintaining 6-10 feet apart between families.
- 31. Attendees must keep their mask on when going up to receive Holy Communion, and should only take off mask when they are in front of the chalice.** Once they have received Communion, they must put their mask back on.
- 32. Altar server will hand people the antidoron (Holy Bread) as people leave.** Altar server will sanitize their hands, wear gloves and mask when handing out holy bread.
- 33. Ushers will guide everyone out right after Communion.**
- 34. People must exit the church immediately, using the ramp door. Please ensure everyone maintains social distancing as they leave.**
- 35. There is absolutely no congregating in the church, narthex or hallway, even with relatives.**

- 36. Services will continue to be livestreamed.** While attending the church service, attendees must not get near the live streaming equipment.
- 37. Ushers should direct people to use only the designated bathrooms while in the church building.** Direct people to follow the posted signs. The following restrooms have been designated during this time:
 - 1) Men's restroom** – use the restroom in the narthex, near the conference room door.
 - 2) Women's restroom** – use the restroom in the cry room.
- 38. Restroom door knobs and faucets will be disinfected frequently throughout the service with disinfectant wipes.**
- 39. The entire church, narthex, hallway and bathrooms will be professionally sanitized and disinfected after each service.**
- 40. If an usher sees an unattended child, please alert the parent. Parents must watch their children at all times.** Children should not be running around, get near the livestreaming equipment, or approach other people. Children must stay next to their parents at all times. If a child needs to use the restroom, a parent must accompany him/her and ensure the child follows proper hand sanitation before returning to the church.

We understand this is very different, but please be patient as we work hard to ensure we return to church in the safest way possible. We ask that you please follow all these instructions very closely.

We consider this, as much as you do, to be a painful process but care for our neighbor demands that we endure this for a short time. It is our Christian obligation to care for all in our community and protect them from all harm.

Thank you for your cooperation. We appreciate all your help, and we look forward to praying together!

With love in Christ,

Fr. Mousa Haddad, Pastor

Rashid Sweis, Council Chairperson

Dr. Randy Sweis and the COVID Response Committee