



THE DIOCESE OF THE SOUTH

Orthodox Church in America

P.O. Box 191109  
Dallas, TX 75219

DOS 2021-0525A

My Dear Clergy, Monastics and Faithful Parishioners of the Diocese of the South,

Christ is risen!

Please find, below, my updated directives for COVID precautions in the Diocese of the South. These are to be shared with all parishioners via parish bulletins and/or email lists immediately.

In the joy of Christ's Resurrection, I am yours,

+ALEXANDER

Archbishop of Dallas and the South



**Diocese of the South**  
**POST-PANDEMIC DIRECTIVES FOR PARISHES, MISSIONS, AND MONASTERIES**  
**May 25, 2021**

The following directives are obligatory for all parishes, missions and monasteries in the Diocese of the South.

Bear in mind that while no COVID vaccine is 100% effective, the most recent CDC guidance surrounding the resumption of “normal activity” is based on the observation that even though there is a chance vaccinated individuals will contract the virus, they are all but guaranteed to avoid serious illness or hospitalization resulting from a COVID infection. For this reason the Diocese of the South has decided that those who wish to minimize risk of serious illness have been given adequate opportunity to do so.

1. First and foremost, receiving a COVID vaccine is a choice - nobody should feel compelled or coerced to receive the vaccine. It is clear that the ethical issues surrounding COVID vaccines specifically are no less complex than the broader issues related to modern medicine in general. Our hierarchs, along with hierarchs throughout the Orthodox world, have broadly embraced the morality of COVID vaccinations to aid in the alleviation of suffering and death. In an effort to maintain unity within our communities, clergy in the diocese should refrain from vocalizing positions that cast a pall on the morality of the various COVID vaccines - sowing dissent among the faithful in the process. If members of the clergy question the use of the vaccine or face coverings (for one reason or another), they are to refrain from sharing these opinions. The faithful should be encouraged (likewise) to hold these types of opinions privately and to treat all with charity and love.
2. Anyone in the parish or mission, including clergy, who exhibits coronavirus symptoms (including loss of taste/smell, respiratory issues, shortness of breath, fever, fatigue, muscle aches, sore throat etc.) must refrain from attending services and seek medical attention as appropriate. Their return to parish life should happen no sooner than 10 days after symptom onset *or* with a negative covid test *and* cessation of symptoms. Further, if anyone attends with obvious, visible COVID or Flu-like symptoms, it is the responsibility of the priest (or a designated, tactful parish council member) to assure that the ill person is informed of this directive, and asked to please return home until they are well. Take note that while sneezing is not a typical COVID symptom, and can be attributed to allergies, a persistent cough cannot be reliably considered allergy related. In short, “It’s allergies,” should *not* be a commonly accepted reason to dismiss symptoms as irrelevant.
3. While the current CDC guidance encourages the removal of masks for the vaccinated *only*, the Diocese of the South recognizes the challenge of maintaining separate standards for the vaccinated and unvaccinated; therefore separate masking standards for the vaccinated and unvaccinated will not be undertaken in the Diocese of the South.

4. Since there cannot be an expectation that the unvaccinated will wear masks to prevent the spread of COVID, it should be stressed to parishioners that everyone is welcome (and encouraged) to continue wearing face coverings if there is any level of discomfort with the new guidance. In short, while the Archbishop blesses cessation of masking requirements in the parish, every priest should be quite clear with their parishioners that everyone *may* continue wearing face coverings.
5. There will be no tolerance for “mask shaming” toward those who choose to continue wearing them. Additionally, if parishioners are not comfortable with the cessation of precautions, some pastoral accommodation should be sought.
6. There will almost certainly be COVID outbreaks among the unvaccinated (this is defined as confirmed case(s) among 2 or more households) especially in situations where a large number of parishioners have not been vaccinated. When this happens, rectors / priests-in-charge are expected to a) immediately notify the parish of the situation, b) cancel services and c) notify Diocesan Administration (Chancellor / Administrator) AND your Dean about the situation. Your reopening schedule will be decided in consultation with DOS Administration and not at the parish/deanery level.
7. High-risk individuals who have not been vaccinated should be expressly encouraged to continue wearing masks (though this will not be mandated).
8. This new guidance permits parishes to discontinue previously directed precautions on June 1. However, each rector / priest-in-charge is welcome to continue with their previously planned and announced “reopening plan.”
9. If any rector/priest-in-charge has not yet planned their parish cessation of precautions, they should contact the DOS Chancellor immediately to discuss their concerns.
10. Finally, if any member of the diocese, clergyman or laity, has any concerns or questions about these directives and/or their implementation (or failure to do so), please bring this to the attention of the [Chancellor](#) or [Administrator](#) of the Diocese of the South.

+ Alexander

+ALEXANDER  
Archbishop of Dallas and the South  
25 May, 2021



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