



Welcoming Our Family of Faith Back Home

A Plan to Transition to Public Gatherings at our Liturgical Celebrations

***“We are the children of your Church, and with our Lamps lit,
we come to Church as to the harbor of our salvation.”***

From The Rite of the Coming to the Harbor

On March 23, 2020, Governor Baker issued an Executive Order that imposed strict social distancing in an effort to help curb the spread of COVID-19. Our Parish followed the Eparchial Guideline and complied with Governor Baker’s Order and, as a result, we imposed strict restrictions on the public attendance of our Liturgical Celebrations. This was especially painful as we approached Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter Sunday, however, we felt that the strict social distancing was an important part of the plan to protect the health of parishioners. We began to Live Stream our Liturgical Celebrations on Zoom, and our overwhelming numbers of our Parishioners and Friends joined us to virtually celebrate God’s love for us. While we are grateful for the understanding and cooperation of our Parishioners and Friends, we are anxiously awaiting the day when we can gather as a family of faith and once again, in one voice, celebrate the Liturgy.

Governor Baker has now issued a COVID-19 Executive Order No. 33 (“Governor Baker’s Order”) setting forth procedures that must be followed to transition back public gatherings. This plan sets forth our Parish’s plan to implement these new public gathering processes to allow us to return “to the Church as to the harbor of our salvation” in a manner that also allows us to protect the health of Parishioners. This plan will be amended as necessary.

CONDITIONS THAT ALLOW US TO TRANSITION TO PHASE 1

Pursuant to the Governor Baker’s Order “recent public health data indicate improvement in key areas of measurement as a result of the extraordinary efforts of health care providers in the Commonwealth and the public’s unselfish compliance with the restrictions imposed in COVID-19 Order No. 13 and other limitations imposed in response to the COVID-19 health crisis” and so the Commonwealth can to transition into Phase 1.

CONDITIONS THAT WILL BE MONITORED TO DETERMINE WHETHER WE CAN CONTINUE TO TRANSITION TOWARD FULL REOPENING:

Pursuant to the Governor Baker’s Order “improving public health data permits a carefully phased relaxation of certain restrictions that COVID-19 Order No 13 placed on the Commonwealth, provided that any adjustment can only be maintained or expanded on the basis of continuing improvements in public health data.

There are six (6) public health data indicators that will be monitored by the Commonwealth to determine if we can continue to relax these certain restrictions. The indicators will be reviewed as a group. The indicators are:

- COVID-19 Positive Test Rate
- Number of Individuals who have died from COVID-19
- Number of Patients with COVID-19 in the Hospital
- Healthcare System Readiness
- Testing Capacity
- Contact Tracing Capabilities

PHASE 1 REQUIREMENTS

Pursuant to Governor Baker's Order, provided the public health indicators continue to show progress, we may transition to Phase 1 which would allow us to once again gather in person for Liturgical Celebrations if we comply with certain requirements. The relevant requirements to transition to limited public gatherings under Phase 1 are:

1. Remote Participation must still be encouraged;
2. Public gatherings must be limited to no more than 40% of the Church's maximum permitted occupancy level (including the celebrant, deacons & subdeacons, altar servers, readers, choir members, and ushers) unless services are being held outside;
3. On-line sign-up for services in advance is encouraged to monitor and limit the number of attendees;
4. Individuals who are feeling sick or have been advised to self-quarantine shall not be allowed to attend the public gathering;
5. Persons aged 65 years or older, or who have underlying compromised health conditions are encouraged to remain home in Phase 1;
6. All individuals attending a public gathering must wear a mask or similar covering over the mouth & nose;
7. All attendees, who are not in the same household, must socially distance by maintaining a six-foot buffer between themselves and other attendees.
8. The Church must be cleaned and disinfected between each service, including disinfection of heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces.
9. The Church must ensure that attendees have access to handwashing facilities, including soap and running water, and are encouraged to make alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol available.
10. If the Church learns that an attendee or volunteer at a service has tested positive for COVID-19, it shall notify the New Bedford Board of Health and assist the Board of Health as reasonably requested to trace likely contacts and advise contacts to isolate and self-quarantine.

THE PLAN TO TRANSITION BACK TO PUBLIC ATTENDANCE OF LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS

During the past two months, Fr. Vince has regularly conferred with the Parish's COVID-19 Task Force in an effort to implement the best practices possible to allow the Parishioners of Our Lady of Purgatory Church to participate in liturgical celebrations which maintain the strict social distancing necessary to protect the health and safety of the Parishioners. Fr. Vince has now conferred with the Task Force, and based on input from the Task Force, has developed the following plan to transition the Parish back to public attendance of Liturgical Celebrations while complying with the Phase 1 requirements. This plan will be periodically amended to reflect updated guidance or to address concerns that arise.

1. The Parish will continue to refine and enhance the ability to live stream or broadcast Liturgical Celebrations.
 - a. During Phase 1, Parishioners aged 65 years and older, and parishioners with compromised immunity systems or who have been advised that they are at risk to respiratory complications are strongly advised to remain home and continue to live stream Liturgical Celebrations. While we anxiously await being able to celebrate once again with these Parishioners, we understand that it is important to protect their health and safety.
2. Attendance at Liturgical Celebrations, including the Celebration of the Divine Liturgy will be limited to 75 persons (not including the celebrant, deacons & subdeacons, altar servers, readers, choir members, and ushers) and will be subject to the following conditions:
 - a. All attendees will be given a mask at the time they enter the Church and must keep their mask on at all times while in Church with the exception of when they are receiving communion;
 - i. We'd like to remind everyone that it is possible to have COVID-19 and not exhibit any symptoms. Therefore the use of a mask during this pandemic is intended to help prevent the wearer from inadvertently infecting others as much as it is to protect the wearer from becoming infected. In a small way, this is "being a person for others."
 - ii. Personal face coverings will be allowed in lieu of a mask.
 - b. All attendees will receive hand sanitizer when they enter the Church;
 - c. All attendees will be required to observe six (6) foot social distancing while in Church.
 - d. All attendees will be required to comply with the request of the Ushers while in Church.
3. Initially, weekend Divine Liturgies will be celebrated on Saturdays at 5:00 pm. and on Sundays at 10:30 am. The number of weekend Divine Liturgies and the times of the Divine Liturgies may be adjusted in response to the need to provide additional opportunities to participate after consultation with the Eparchy.
 - a. We are aware that one of the greatest losses that Parishioners have felt during the pandemic has been the loss of the opportunity to receive Communion. We encourage all Parishioners to cooperate so that the greatest number of Parishioners may once again regularly receive Communion.
 - b. During Phase 1, in an attempt to provide the opportunity to the greatest number of Parishioners to receive Communion, we will institute the practice of using sign up sheets for attendance at the Weekend Divine Liturgies. We want to be very clear that the use of sign up sheets for Divine Liturgies is something that causes us great concern, yet it appears to be the most effective, and least intrusive way, to provide the opportunity for the greatest number of Parishioners to regularly receive Communion. We intend to discontinue the use of sign up sheets for attendance at Divine Liturgies as soon as practicable.
 - c. Parishioners wishing to attend a weekend Divine Liturgy will be able to sign up through the Parish website at www.ourladyofpurgatory.org . For those Parishioners who don't have access to the internet, you can call Joe Barckett at (617) 803-4087 between the hours of 10:00 am and 2:00 pm and he will provide sign up assistance.
 - d. Attendance will be on a first come basis. In an effort to provide the opportunity for the greatest number of Parishioners to receive Communion, Parishioners will not be allowed to sign up to attend weekend Divine Liturgies on consecutive days or consecutive weekends during Phase 1 until other Parishioners who have not had the opportunity to attend a weekend Divine Liturgy have had the opportunity to sign up.

- e. If the need arises, additional liturgies may be scheduled on a temporary basis during Phase 1 to allow more Parishioners to attend in person. This will be in the discretion of the Pastor.
 - f. If there is still availability for a Saturday Divine Liturgy at Noon on the particular Saturday, then anyone may sign up to attend. If there is still availability for a Sunday Divine Liturgy at 8:00 pm on the Saturday before, then anyone may sign up to attend.
 - g. In order to attend a weekend Divine Liturgy, a person must have previously completed the sign up form. Only one person from a household needs to complete the sign up form.
4. During the pendency of Phase 1, the main doors to the Church on Pleasant Street will remain locked. Parishioners may enter the Church through the Franklin Street Door. Parishioners may only exit the Church (unless there is an emergency) through the Parking Lot Door. Those requiring a handicap entrance will be allowed to enter and exit through the Parking Lot Door. The outer aisles will be marked as one way toward the back of the Church and the main aisle will be marked as one way toward the Sanctuary.
 5. During the pendency of Phase 1, Communion will only be distributed in the hand without the precious blood for the safety of all. We encourage our Parishioners to offer the loss of being able to receive Communion by intinction for the suffering souls in Purgatory.
 6. While we understand that Parishioners will want to gather before and after Divine Liturgy to greet each other and spend some time together, such a gathering is not prudent during Phase 1 and so we would respectfully request that Parishioners not gather before and after Divine Liturgies.
 7. The Church will be sanitized following each Divine Liturgy using best practices.
 8. All of the Hymnals will be removed and disposable sheets containing the communal responses and hymns for that particular Liturgy will be distributed before each Liturgy.
 9. During the pendency of Phase 1, we will not be passing a basket for collections of donations from Parishioners. A basket will be placed near the Parking Lot Door to facilitate collection of donations from Parishioners.

USHERS

For generations here at Our Lady of Purgatory we have had Parishioners volunteer to serve as Ushers at our Liturgical Celebrations. Our ushers have helped folks find a seat, have answered questions, have assisted Parishioners contribute to the financial support of the Parish, and have assisted the Pastor as needed. During Phase 1, there will be four (4) Ushers at each Liturgy. The Ushers will facilitate attendance by Parishioners who have signed up to attend a Divine Liturgy, they will distribute masks and hand sanitizer, they will facilitate compliance with social distancing requirements, and they will be able to answer any questions or concerns Parishioners attending a Divine Liturgy or other Liturgical Celebration may have.

We ask that you realize that the Ushers are there to help us all be able to gather during Phase 1 and that you comply with their requests.

We'd like to thank our Ushers for agreeing to do this. If you would like to join the ranks of the Ushers, please contact Fr. Vince at (508) 996-8934 or Matt Thomas at (774) 930-2936.

RESTROOM FACILITIES

Until further notice the restroom in the Rectory Basement will not be available to the public. The newly constructed restroom located near the Franklin Street Door will be available to attendees during Phase 1.

The restroom will be stocked with bathroom tissue, paper towels, soap and hand sanitizer. The door knob will be disinfected periodically during each Liturgy. The restroom will be disinfected and sanitized after each Liturgy or prayer service.

PASTORAL DISCRETION

The practices set forth in this plan may be altered by the Pastor of Our Lady of Purgatory Church in his sole discretion, to more fully address pastoral concerns that may arise during Phase 1.

IN CLOSING

The past few months have been very challenging, however, our Parishioners have once again shown their love and devotion to Our Lady of Purgatory and the Parish. This should come as no surprise, since our Parish has thrived in spite of the destruction of the church edifice by fire in December, 1933, the death of Fr. Jowdy in the Hurricane of '38, and not having a Parish Priest in residence in the Rectory from 1938 to 1954.

We thank Our Lady of Purgatory and her husband, St. Joseph for interceding for us, and we thank our Lord for His love, mercy and providence, and for the gift of those countless Priests and Parishioners who have brought us to our 103 year. May we honor their memory and be worthy stewards of this amazing gift of fath and grace that we have been given.

For Further Information please contact Fr. Vince at (508) 996-8934 or by e-mail at ourladyofpurgatory@verizon.net. You can also visit our website at www.ourladyofpurgatory.org or our Facebook page at Our Lady of Purgatory Church - Maronite Rite.

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