

Orthodox Parish of St Nicholas the Wonderworker

PATRIARCHATE OF MOSCOW ~ DIOCESE OF SOUROZH



FROM THE RECTOR

19th July 2021

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

Following the relaxation of government coronavirus restrictions in England yesterday, we have today received the following message from our diocesan bishop:

Dear Fathers Rectors, clerics and parishioners of the Sourozh diocese!

On July 19, 2021, the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland lifted most of the restrictions previously imposed in connection with the spread of coronavirus infection. Based on this decision, the parishes of the Sourozh diocese located on the territory of Great Britain can return to the usual order of organizing their parish life. The wearing of masks and social distancing are no longer required, however these security measures may be the personal choice of clergy and parishioners. Parishes can also uphold some of the restrictions imposed earlier, at the discretion of the Rectors and parish meetings.

Drawing attention to the danger of the continuation of the spread of the infection and the associated risks to health and life, I call on all the faithful children of the Sourozh diocese to continue your intense prayer to end the epidemic and to comply with all the recommendations and orders of the authorities aimed at preventing the spread of coronavirus.

+ Matthew

Bishop of Sourozh

In light of Vlayka's message, I am sure that we would all wish to move forward prudently towards resuming a more normal experience of parish life. At the same time, some in our community will be apprehensive about taking a big step and making many big changes at present. Consequently, for the time being, I would ask you to take note of the following provisions:

1. Although not required by law, in the interests of the peace and wellbeing of all our community, I would ask that you continue to wear a mask or face covering at services, in particular when the church is crowded (eg the Sunday Liturgy), or when there is no possibility to stand at a distance of more than one metre from your neighbour.
2. It is now permitted to venerate the Cross, the holy icons and relics by kissing them, with or without a mask, and to kiss the priests' hands on receiving a blessing from them. It is also perfectly acceptable to continue to venerate these without making physical contact (by bowing or some other gesture of reverence). The icon cases will be cleaned thoroughly between services, and we will continue to provide hand sanitiser throughout the church for those wishing to use it.
3. As there is no longer a requirement to limit numbers in church, the online booking system for services will be discontinued. All services will now be open to anyone who wishes to attend. We will endeavour to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at regular intervals during the week, so that those wishing to attend church with more space and less crowding may do so. We will continue to display a QR poster for those using the 'Track and Trace' system, but we will not be asking people to leave their contact details at services.
4. We will return to celebrating the services in our usual way. The way in which the clergy cense the church and icons, the processions, the Great Entrance at the Liturgy and so on will all return to our regular practice, requiring members of the congregation to move peacefully out of the way from time to time to allow the servers and clergy to pass by. Holy Communion will be distributed in the normal manner, and the *antidoron* and *zapivka* (the blessed bread and wine and water) after Communion will be offered in the traditional way. The Creed and the Lord's Prayer will now be sung by the choir, with congregational participation permitted.
5. Confessions will now normally take place after the Saturday evening service, before the Sunday Liturgy and by appointment during the week. Confessions will not be heard during the Divine Liturgy, and there will no

longer be a general confession or absolution during the Liturgy, except in special circumstances. For the time being, it is asked that masks should be worn during confession.

Our parish meeting on Sunday 15th August will provide an opportunity to review the situation, and to share our thoughts and observations. In the meantime, please feel free to address any questions or concerns to me, and I will do my best to answer and reassure.

I encourage all of you to heed Vladyka Matthew's admonition to increase prayer for the end of the pandemic. May the blessing of the Lord be upon you!

With love in Christ,

Fr Stephen

Archpriest Stephen Platt

Rector

St Nicholas Orthodox Church

Oxford