

# COVID-19 Pandemic

## Guidelines & Considerations for Pastoral Home Visitations



APRIL 2020 | Prepared by COVID-19 Assembly of Bishops Task Force



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL  
ORTHODOX BISHOPS  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# Guidelines for Actively Symptomatic Clergy or Parishioners

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If the visiting clergy or parishioner requesting a visit is actively experiencing any symptoms, even mild ones, that may be related to COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, sore throat, myalgia, fatigue, nausea, or diarrhea) in the absence of a pre-existing, known condition as the cause (e.g., chemotherapy from cancer, medication side effects, heart failure) or has been diagnosed with COVID-19, the following guidelines should be followed in addition to the general guidelines for all visits at the end of this document:

## **For CLERGY experiencing possible symptoms of or diagnosed with COVID-19**

Send another clergyman if available OR postpone the visit until the priest is medically cleared and symptoms have completely resolved.

## **For a PARISHIONER experiencing possible symptoms of or diagnosed with COVID-19**

### **In a NON-emergency situation**

Postpone the visit until the parishioner has been medically cleared and symptoms have completely resolved, but the clergy and parishioner should still have as much of the pastoral visit as possible by telephone or an online/video platform.

### **In an EMERGENCY situation only (e.g., end of life)**

#### **Protective gear**

The clergy and parishioner should wear a mask, even if the mask is made out of readily-available cloth (e.g., shirt materials, bandanas, etc.) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>.

The clergy should wear personal protective equipment (PPE): an N95 or better face mask, face shield, gloves, and gown.

- Follow proper PPE donning and doffing procedures and any other potentially contaminated clothing after a pastoral visit - procedure order and appropriate caution matters!
  - Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84CydmuHxD8>
  - CDC Guide: <https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/ppe/ppe-sequence.pdf>

If appropriate PPE is not available:

- The clergy will need to *exclude themselves from contact with others for a minimum of 14 days* for self-monitoring and subsequent self-isolation if they develop symptoms (including from other family members if possible and especially so if they are higher risk) after the emergency pastoral visit (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>).



- Wear the highest quality equivalents, as available (e.g., N95/N99 respirators are commonly used around the home for avoiding dust, other dust mask, or cloth mask; a face shield can be constructed from a plastic sheet protector and an old ball cap, etc.).
- Wear glasses instead of contacts if no facemask is available.

## **Maintaining distance**

Avoid entering the parishioner's home, if possible, and conduct the pastoral visit by staying outside of the home. Some suggestions for accomplishing this are:

- The parishioner stays inside the house behind a closed window, speaking to the priest (standing in front of the window on the outside) on the telephone if hearing is impaired through the window.
- If windows are not available in the parishioner's home/apartment, the priest and parishioner could speak or pray together via telephone and video apps until it is time for absolution, unction, or administration the Eucharist, if any of these are part of the pastoral visit.
- Commune the parishioner in the doorway, on the front porch, etc.
  - Have available a lightweight, foldable tray or card table that can be easily transported, set up, and taken down to ease the process of setting up the Sacrament of Communion outside of the parishioner's home.
  - Have the parishioner informed and prepared to commune in the doorway/on the front porch/outside doorstep of the house.
- Give the parishioner a signal or specific time to be ready to step outside of the house to commune and return inside the house immediately after partaking of the Eucharist.

If the parishioner is unable to come to the door or outside, e.g., because they are bedbound, the following are recommended:

- Those assisting the parishioner should sanitize the entrance door handle (inside and outside) and open the door for the clergy if possible so the clergy can enter without contacting any surfaces.
- If no assistance is available, the clergy should be the only person touching the entrance door handle (inside and outside) during the visit.
- Clergy should enter the home with all materials that will be used during the visit.
- If clergy is administering the Eucharist, both clergy and parishioner should continue wearing masks during except for the parishioner momentarily to briefly remove their mask to partake of the Eucharist before putting the mask on again.
- Clergy should exit the house/apartment from the same door that was used for entrance and wash their hands and remove outer garments and place them in a sealed plastic bag until they can be laundered.
- The parishioner should sanitize the entrance/exit door handle (inside and outside) after the clergy has departed and wash their hands.



## Guidelines for Asymptomatic Clergy AND Parishioners

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If neither the clergy nor the parishioner have COVID-19 symptoms and wish to conduct a pastoral visit, the following guidelines should be followed:

Unless the in-person visitation is required the pastoral interaction should occur via telephone or online/video services.

If an in-person visitation is required, the clergy should avoid entering the parishioner's home, if possible.

- The clergy and parishioner should wear a mask, even if the mask is made out of readily-available cloth (e.g., shirt materials, bandanas, etc.) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>.
- If masks are worn and close contact is minimized, self-isolation is not needed following a visit among asymptomatic persons.

Otherwise, conduct the visit by staying outside of the home using the guidelines above for emergency visits in addition to the general guidelines for all visits at the end of this document.



# General Guidelines for ALL Pastoral Visits

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Prepare and pack a “COVID-19 Prevention Supply Kit” now with a minimum of:

- Soap
- Hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol
- Gloves
- Face masks
- Any other type of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that is available to you
- Trash bags to place any clothing or materials into that may be contaminated
- Clorox or antiseptic wipes

Clergy and parishioner should not greet each other with handshakes or hugs and the parishioner should not kiss the priest’s hand.

Clergy and parishioner should conduct the visit in the largest space of the house/apartment.

- Ideally, this space will have room for the parishioner and clergy to sit 6+ feet away from each other and will have windows that can be opened or indoor fans operating for air circulation.

Wash hands frequently, preferably with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, but at a minimum with hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Wear freshly laundered clothing.

Avoid touching one’s eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid close contact with people - maintain at least 6 ft between persons who do not live in the same household.

Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces frequently with EPA approved disinfectants in accordance with their use instructions. Additional details can be found at CDC - COVID-19 - Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility.

Where possible, leave doors open so people do not need to contact the doorknobs, etc.

