

July 11th, 2020

Dear Members and Adherents of St. Vladimir's Ukr. Orth. Sobor,

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Who would have guessed that we would be in these abnormal and trying times. Covid-19 has affected all of our lives in ways we could not have imagined several months ago. Self-isolation became encouraged as a form of sacrificial love for the vulnerable members of our society. His Eminence Metropolitan Yuriy issued an Epistle mandating that all Church properties be closed, so our Sobor was closed since mid-March. We have been going to livestreaming to other churches but not to our own "spiritual home." A disconnect has happened. We are all feeling the pain of not being able to worship, commune, and socialize with each other. We are hardwired as social beings. We all need hugs yet we have refrained from doing this with family members from different households as well as our Church family.

This reminds me of a passage from Matthew 12:46-50; 13:13

At that time, while Jesus was speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother."

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he entered a boat and sat there; and the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables.

The Lord began His teaching ministry and His earthly family; His mother, step-siblings, and cousins, were watching His popularity grow and they were concerned for Him. Some modern churches suggest that this passage proves that Jesus dismissed the importance of His family, even His mother, the Theotokos. Others point to this as proof that Mary and Joseph had other children besides the Lord. Let's just leave it at that they are reading more into the passage than is allowed and they are ignoring other information that would correct their quick judgment.

But the passage does show the Lord's priorities in life. Notice how the Lord defines His eternal Family beyond mere genetic connections. He declares that doing God's will reveals His true family! Doing the will of following the will of God, creates a deeper bond with Christ than the bond created by DNA. Just as we are now getting together with other family members we need to look at how His eternal Family in St. Vladimir's can cautiously open the door of His house to allow prayer before His altar "on behalf of all and for all."

As you may have seen, the pandemic situation is improving in Alberta and the province has slowly and cautiously began reopening aspects of our society and economy. Places of worship are beginning to reopen. We too have been looking at these events with cautious optimism and have been preparing for the right time to safely resume a liturgical prayer life in our Church.

The reopening must occur in strict compliance with Alberta health authority directives regarding social distancing and observance of proper hygienic and sanitizing practices. To this end, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada has circulated a reopening checklist to assist parishes in reopening churches for Sunday worship. The Parish Council has followed the checklist and is in a position to open for regular Sunday service on July 19th, 2020 to those who have preregistered as the number of people who may attend at any one time is limited. Following our Lord's scriptural teachings "we are to love our neighbor as ourselves", this includes not exposing our neighbours to potential harm (Covid-19).

Metropolitan Yuriy has stated that he strongly encourages those who are 65 years of age and older, as well as those that have chronic medical conditions, to remain at home for the time being.

We are sending out information as to how to preregister and the strict protocol that we have put in place so that no one is put into jeopardy. We have moved the start time to 10:00am to allow time to confirm registration at the entrance and to guide people to their seats. The doors will soon after be locked for the safety of those participating. We have a call out for volunteers and their responsibilities.

Since this reopening is taking place in a very measured and careful manner, we are having a service on July 12th with ONLY the Parish Council and their families. Council members will be filling all volunteer positions to become familiar with the Covid 19 protocols and to make sure we have not overlooked anything.

At this time, His Eminence Metropolitan Yuri has not blessed lay participation in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist for safety reasons. We

will continue to follow the protocol that I had in place before the closing of the Church. You are asked to refrain from venerating Icons, crosses, etc. Please become familiar with the protocols we have in place.

I do want to let everyone know that your decision to attend or not attend is yours to make alone and that there is no right or wrong decision. Whatever, you decide is the right decision for you.

For those who at this time because of age, health risks, or not comfortable to attend, we are looking at the ability to set up for livestreaming so that you can join your own church family in worship. We need to look at the possibility that this pandemic may be around for a while. To this end, I will also be looking at setting up programs for the fall that can be done over the internet such as: Bible Study, Educational talks, marriage prep with my couples getting married, etc.

These are still abnormal times and we must take every precaution necessary. But remember the Church faced abnormal times throughout its history (persecutions, pandemics, etc). We will get through this together.

Please continue to pray for the world, the Church, St. Vladimir's Parish Council and for your sinful servant Fr. Patrick and his family. Know that we pray that you stay safe, healthy and that we may once again see each other with no barriers in the near future. We ask this in His name.

Yours In Christ,

Fr. Patrick Yamniuk
St. Vladimir's Ukr. Orthodox Sobor

Please note: The Alberta health authorities may do spot check on gatherings to ensure compliance and if we fail to follow the directives, we may be exposed to a fine.

Yours In Christ,