Digital Guidelines for the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival

COVID-19 has certainly made this a difficult year for all of us as we strive to continue parish ministries, while still abiding by the necessary precautions to ensure the safety of our communities.

The promising recent news about multiple vaccines makes us hopeful and optimistic that the Archdiocese or National Oratorical Festival will be able to be held in-person at St. Spyridon church in Loveland, Colorado. The weekend of June 11 – 13, 2021 has been selected.

Working with the Archdiocese Department of Internet Ministries, we have made a back-up plan for how a virtual National Festival can proceed, should we need to host the festival virtually.

Of course, we realize that Parish, District, and Metropolis Festivals take place earlier in the year and in locations with different restrictions in place. The teams coordinating these festivals may need to consider hosting festivals virtually.

Please note, it is the decision of the Parish, District, and Metropolis Festival coordinators whether to host your festival in-person or virtually. This document is intended to provide some guidance for you to consider, depending on how you choose to host your festival.

Hosting In-Person Festivals During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Please follow the mask, social distancing, and gathering guidelines of your parish and local community. For example, parishes that are meeting in-person for services where all of the parishioners are required to wear masks during the service could host an Oratorical Festival in-person, as long as the attendees are spaced out and wearing masks – other than the speakers when they are delivering their speeches, of course. Some additional considerations:

- Photos at in-person events: Please be mindful of safety protocols throughout the event if you choose to host an in-person event. We suggest that you either forego the traditional group photo or ask everyone to wear a mask in the photo if you choose to take one. Individual photos should be possible, while a participant is speaking or afterwards.

- Meals at events: We realize that a meal is often served at in-person events. Local guidelines about meals must be observed. Please consider either not hosting a meal or please take precautions to make sure that food and utensils are not touched by multiple people, that masks and gloves are worn by anyone serving food, etc.

- Notify participants in advance of the safety protocols. Please plan to send the participants an email notifying them of the safety protocols that will be in place during the event, so they are aware of what is being requested of them, and that their participation means that they are agreeing to abide by the guidelines.
Hosting Virtual Festivals During the COVID-19 Pandemic

If a Parish, District, or Metropolis chooses to host a festival virtually, here are some things you may want to consider:

- If your parish has been broadcasting its services, consider engaging the person who set this up for your church to work with you on hosting a virtual festival.
- Parishes can choose the platform – Zoom, WebEx or an alternative – that either the parish or a volunteer within the parish can access.
- The event should be held live. You may want to consider having your judges join you in a room (safely distanced of course) to watch the event together and to deliberate afterwards together – as long as this is compliant with local safety guidelines at the time.
- Speakers should sit in front of their laptop or desktop computers to deliver their speech (as opposed to being broadcast via phone by someone standing across the room from the person). Each speaker would therefore be seen from their chest upwards. It’s important to provide these guidelines to your speakers so that there is consistency. This approach minimizes the risk of audio difficulties.
- Speakers should dress as they would in church. The backgrounds should be of the home or office where the speech is delivered, not an imported “background” for the video platform. However, a parish, District, or Metropolis might consider using a common background image for all speakers to utilize.
- You may want to schedule in advance a specific time later in the day when the finalists will be announced, in order to give judges plenty of time to deliberate.
- If you are hosting a festival and anticipate having 10 or more speakers per division (Junior and Senior), you may want to consider providing a separate Zoom/WebEx link for each division and scheduling them to occur at a specific, pre-determined time of day. This way you don’t have a lot of extra people on the WebEx and there is less risk of unwanted background noise.
- Because your speakers won’t be in person, it could be helpful to identify and communicate the speaker order before the event. You can use a random list generator like random.org/lists/ The speakers could change their presentation names on the screen, to Oratorical Speaker 1, 2, 3, etc., to conform to the usual protocol of not introducing speakers by name.
- Please plan to have your speakers log-in 15 minutes prior to the event to ensure that everyone can be heard and seen properly.
- Ask everyone in the event to go on mute when they are not speaking.

Prepared on December 28, 2020. Subject to change. Check local guidelines.