

March 17, 2020
Protocol 03/015

To the Venerable Abbots and Abbesses and monastics of our communities,
To the President and Dean of our Seminaries,
To the clergy and faithful of the Archdiocese of Washington,
To the clergy and faithful of the Albanian Archdiocese,
To the clergy and faithful of the Diocese of New England,

Christ is in our midst!

I am grateful for your patience and reassured in the knowledge that our clergy, monastics, and faithful remain steadfast in their devotion to Jesus Christ and to the life of the Church, even in these turbulent and confusing times of the coronavirus outbreak.

Today, I have issued a pastoral letter to the Church and the Holy Synod of Bishops has issued some further directives concerning the celebration of the Divine Services. I ask that you read these carefully and make them available throughout our communities.

Although I just recently communicated with you concerning temporary measures to be implemented in all the dioceses and institutions over which I presently have oversight, I am communicating the following updated directives which supercede my March 13 letter.

Effective immediately:

- All parishes and missions of the Archdiocese of Washington, the Albanian Archdiocese, and the Diocese of New England are closed through April 1, 2020.
- All monastery chapels are closed to the public but permitted to maintain the regular (or modified) cycle of services for the brotherhood and sisterhood alone, through April 1, 2020.
- All seminary chapels are closed to the public and the respective administrations instructed to implement the appropriate safety measures with respect to gatherings of individuals and the teaching of classes.
- Parish and mission clergy should make it a priority to reach out by every means available to the faithful and to make sure that their pastoral needs are being met. The temporary closing of the temples of worship does not mean the cessation of the life of the Church.



P.O. BOX 675
SYOSSET, NY 11791-0675
TEL: 516.922.0550
FAX: 516.922.0954
WEBSITE: WWW.OCA.ORG

· If presanctified lambs were prepared last Sunday, these may be used for the purpose of bringing communion, on an individual basis, to those who may wish to receive and to those who are ill, or should be consumed by the priest.

· Visits to the sick in nursing homes and hospitals must be predicated on the regulations currently in place by those institutions and by the civil authorities. Visits to homes should be made with all care for the health of the parishioners and the clergy.

· Weddings, of course, should not have been scheduled during this lenten season. In the case of funerals, I ask the clergy to contact me or the Chancellor/Dean in each particular case.

· Clergy may not celebrate any divine liturgies privately in their parishes or homes, even for their families, but are encouraged to serve other services, such as molebens or akathists, and to broadcast them, as well as sermons or reflections, electronically to their faithful. Make use of the talent that is available in your parishes and missions to find new and creative ways to bolster the life of the community.

· A tab has been added to the home page of the Orthodox Church in America website with the title: "Coronavirus Resources" (it is the first tab on the right side under the purple header). There is a wealth of resources available to everyone, including services and reading material. This will be updated regularly as new resources become available.

I will maintain further communications with all of you during this difficult time and beyond (since it likely that these circumstances may continue for some time). The Holy Synod will be carefully monitoring the situation as we move forward.

There are some who might think that the above is an overreaction to the civil or medical authorities. I would only remind us of the words of Sirach: "Honour a physician with the honour due unto him for the uses which ye may have of him: for the Lord hath created him." (Sirach 38:1). None of us has perfect knowledge of the mysteries of life and death. We do the best we can with the help of God and those to whom he has granted wisdom.

Others may worry that the above directives will shatter our life in community and separate us from Church life. I would ask you to be mindful that these actions are taken for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and even for the larger community. This is an opportunity to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the neighbor whom we love

Finally, I would like to reassure everyone that none of these decisions was taken lightly and all of them are intended to provide for the care and safety of our clergy and faithful. They are also implemented in this way to possibly preserve our future liturgical life, especially as we get closer to Holy Week and Pascha. Together with our Holy Synod, I have been



agonizing, along with all of you, about the proper and effective approach to take. I ask you to accept these directives as an expression my love and pastoral care for you.

Thank you for your leadership and your example of calm perseverance in the midst of this crisis. By God's grace and mercy, I am confident that we will pass through this trial and, regardless of the darkness around us, will enter into the joy of the resurrection.

Sincerely yours in Christ.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Tikhon', written in a cursive style.

+ TIKHON
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

ADDENDUM

The following guidelines from my previous letter remain in effect:

- 1) These measures should be taken as our Christian response to protect our brothers and sisters. It is a sacrificial effort that we make, which is in keeping with the present season of repentance and ascetical striving. No one should feel deprived of Holy Communion but may request that the priest bring them the sacrament at home. Otherwise, like the ascetics of old who would depart from their monasteries for the forty days of Lent in preparation for Holy Week, we should take this opportunity to prayerfully reflect on our life in Christ and increase our desire to be with Him.
- 2) No one should feel any concern about the canonical implications of being absent from the divine services. We find ourselves in extraordinary circumstances that require extraordinary responses. The holy body and precious blood of our Lord can never be a source of disease, it is after all for the healing of soul and body, but the COVID-19 virus can still be passed through the congregation. Out of love for our neighbor, we must do everything we can to protect the vulnerable by slowing the rate of infection not only in our parishes, but in the greater community, and thereby allowing the hospitals and medical community to more adequately care for those most at risk.
- 3) All who are "at risk" – the elderly, those with pre-existing conditions, any who are actively sick or exhibiting signs of illness – should absolutely absent themselves from the services.