



Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America

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*Metropolitan Tikhon, Locum Tenens of
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*Very Rev Arthur E. Liolin
Chancellor*

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Venerable Benedict of Nursia

To the clergy and faithful of the Albanian Archdiocese

Christ is in our midst!

As all of us are aware, we are presently journeying through a very unusual lenten season with the added challenge of an on-going (and growing) crisis due to the Corona virus. This crisis has seriously impacted most regions of the world including now our own country and it is disrupting both the broader communities we live in and our local parish life.

As a step in helping us navigate these new circumstances, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America yesterday issued some broad directives to the Church. These directives, which are understood to be temporary, remain in effect and it is important for our clergy to calmly and clearly communicate them to the faithful and for everyone to receive them, not as mandates, but as pastoral guidance offered for the care of every soul in our parishes and the protection of our fellow citizens.

Nevertheless, it was the understanding among the members of the Holy Synod that further measures might be required. In prayerfully reflecting on this evolving situation, I have come to a decision concerning some further measures that I would ask be implemented in this diocese. The following is provided as an general framework, not as a mandate that must be followed precisely in every detail. But, in principle, I am asking all parishes and missions of this diocese, in addition to the directives from the Statement of the Holy Synod, to respond in the following manner:

- All parish and mission events and activities, including coffee fellowship, church school, and the rest, and all services other than the Sunday Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, the Vespertine Liturgy of the Great Feast of Annunciation, and the Presanctified Liturgies, are cancelled through March 31, beginning from today. This policy will be reviewed at that time.
- Everyone in the parish or mission, other than the priest(s) (and deacon(s)), a reader, a server, and a limited number of chanters or singers (all of whom are physically strong and at low risk for COVID-19), is encouraged to remain at home, even at the time of the Divine Liturgy.
- If possible, the service should be webcast on the internet so that the faithful may participate in the prayers, which are themselves a source of grace and consolation. Every effort should be made to provide the faithful with the service texts.

I would like to add the following concerning the above directives:

- 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.

Please continue to work with the Chancellor, Dean, and diocesan leadership on any particular concerns not addressed here, or those that will arise in the future. Of course, I remain available as well to assist and to work with all of you to navigate these challenges. Please remain hopeful in the resurrection and trusting in the love and care of our gracious Lord, the Physician of our souls and bodies.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Metropolitan Tikhon