

Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America makes a Statement regarding COVID-19

February 29, 2020

SYOSSET, NY [OCA]

With the blessing of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, the Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America, Archpriest Alexander Rentel, made the following statement:

In the act of our liturgical gathering, Orthodox Christians, by the Grace of God, enact the sacred mystery of becoming the visible Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit forms and knits us together with other Orthodox Christians throughout the world, working with us and through us to fulfill the saving dispensation. Nothing can affect or change this sacred mystery. Indeed, according to the testimony of the Lord himself, he has established the Church and the very gates of hell shall not prevail against it (cf., Mt 16:17).

In recent days, the outbreak of COVID-19, known popularly as the Corona Disease 2019, or simply the Corona Virus, continues to generate interest in the media and cause feelings of fear and anxiety within society and our communities. At this point, the situation as it exists in the United States, Canada, and Mexico does not warrant extreme measures, as have been called for in other parts of the world. Nonetheless, it is important that our parish communities and their faithful be vigilant in keeping our parishes safe.

The best advice is for Churches to adopt common sense measures: members of the Church should become familiar with the symptoms of the Corona Virus (fever, cough, shortness of breath), and, if these symptoms present themselves, both seek medical help immediately and self-quarantine. In terms of preventing the spread of this virus, again, the best advice is to adopt common sense practices: wash hands thoroughly and frequently, cover your coughs and sneezes, and avoid sharing personal items. Additionally, Church leaders should see to the routine cleaning of frequently touched objects such as, icons or the blessing cross.

In cities and communities where this virus is discovered, the diocesan bishop should be consulted for the blessing to adopt additional temporary measures to prevent the spread of disease in the context of liturgical gatherings.

Please note that in our efforts we should pay special attention to those who might be at risk of more serious complications from this virus: the young, the elderly, and those who already have respiratory or cardiac illnesses.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon and members of the Chancery staff have consulted this past week with members of the Department of Health and Human Services who have advised us that the most prudent action that individuals and communities can take in addition to what is listed in this communication are those listed at the website for the Center for Disease Control [CDC].

His Beatitude asks that all Orthodox Christians pray fervently that our Lord may comfort and heal those already affected by this virus, and grant strength and wisdom to those working to combat and control the virus. He also reminds the faithful of the Orthodox Church in America that plans and preparation to combat the spread of the virus should not inadvertently serve to isolate or stigmatize members of our communities. In fact, our common work should be an opportunity to come together, being united in purpose, and care for those who in need in imitation of our Great Physician of souls and bodies.

May our Lord, the Physician of our souls and bodies, grant us protection, health, and peace!