

GUIDELINES REGARDING COVID-19 FOR CLERGY AND FAITHFUL OF OUR PARISH

March 14, 2020

Yesterday, the President of the United States of America has declared, until further notice, a NATIONAL EMERGENCY in the United States of America with regard to COVID-19, which according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is now a pandemic.

COVID-19, referred to as Corona Disease 2019, or simply “Coronavirus”, continues to spread, causing fear and anxiety within society at large and our own communities of faith. Presently in the United States, escalating precautions are being made, as in other parts of the world. Notwithstanding, it is important that our parish communities, clergy and their faithful, practice both *faith and discernment* in order to maintain the safety of our parishes and those who worship therein. For the Church heals not only with what it says, but what it is—a community of love.

At this time, we are not aware of any confirmed cases of the Coronavirus among the clergy and faithful of our parishes. Nonetheless, we urge you to follow personal hygiene precautions and exercise social distancing measures as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local health authorities.

We pray that the Lord will comfort and aid those already affected by the virus, and grant strength and wisdom to those working to combat and control the virus. Our faithful, especially vulnerable individuals, should consult with their parish priest and health professionals, incorporating faith and discernment, including medical science, for appropriate measures.

Since many have questions about the ways of receiving the Eucharistic communion, our hierarchs will address this issue distinctly and update you if there are any changes. Our parish churches and monasteries will remain open for the celebration of Divine Liturgy.

As we believe that the Holy Mysteries of Christ bring only forgiveness, salvation and life—and *not illness*—let us not tempt the Lord by assuming sicknesses cannot be spread in the space of the church.

We can and must take certain precautionary and common-sense measures, albeit temporarily, to prevent the spread of the virus:

- Anyone, clergy, monastics and laity alike, exhibiting the symptoms of Coronavirus (i.e. fever, cough, shortness of breath, and other symptoms that may be published by medical authorities) should immediately seek medical attention and self-quarantine for the recommended period of fourteen (14) days;
- We recommend that all persons belonging to the vulnerable group (especially elderly, persons with weakened immune system or chronic diseases) stay at their homes.
- Our parish and monastery complexes should be maintained using enhanced sanitization and hygiene protocols as recommended by authorities, which includes increased vigorous custodial cleaning of the entire church facility and the availability of hand sanitizer dispensers at all entrances, in the narthex, common areas, elevators, and so forth;
- Clergy, monastics and faithful, should thoroughly and frequently wash their hands, cover their coughs and sneezes, and avoid sharing personal items, especially altar servers when cutting the liturgical bread (antidoron, or *naphora*);

- Choirs and cantors should also exercise extra precautionary measures, choir members are asked to mark their sanitized music books with their names and take them home with them, so that they do not unintentionally become a vehicle for the transmission of the virus;
- In greeting one another and during concelebrations, faithful are to refrain, at this time, from kissing the hands of celebrants and when asking for blessings;
- Collection plates/baskets are not to be passed, rather put next to the central icon for receiving donations;
- Following the conclusion of Liturgy, the cross is not to be offered for veneration, the faithful should simply make the sign of the cross before the icon, bow their heads respectfully and continue to receive the liturgical bread (antidoron, or *naphora*) from the hands of the celebrant, who will have, once again, thoroughly washed or sanitized his hands before distributing the bread;
- Regarding any uncertainties, especially in areas where the virus is discovered, your Diocesan Bishop must be notified immediately and consulted for hierarchical blessings to adopt additional *temporary* measures to prevent the spread of disease at liturgical gatherings; and
- Our communities and organizations should shut down all activities, such as folklore, Church and Serbian school classes and social events (i.e. coffee hours, luncheons, brunches, dinner, meetings, etc.), except for liturgical gatherings, until further notice. It is incumbent upon church boards to review the federal and state laws, rules and regulations of their jurisdictions and follow them.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services has advised that the most prudent actions that individuals and communities can take, in addition to what is noted above, are to be found at the website of the CDC Resources for Community and Faith-Based Leaders, see:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>.