



THE DIOCESE OF THE SOUTH

Orthodox Church in America

P.O. Box 191109
Dallas, TX 75219

10 March 2020
The Second Week of Great Lent

Dear in Christ,

As we enter the second week of the Great Fast, it is my sincere hope that this season of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and worship will be a profitable time of focus on that “one thing needful,” so that we may encounter Christ on the Holy Pascha with a renewed hope in His resurrection!

While our focus is foremost on this holy season of Lent, none of us can escape the news surrounding the emerging COVID-19 epidemic.

While hysteria is unwarranted, there is indeed just cause for concern. The significant measures that some geographical hot-spots of COVID-19 are implementing, such as canceling crowded events and implementing work-from-home standards, are not simply driven by panic, but by a desire to contain and prevent what could, as authorities have noted, lead to millions of unnecessary deaths.

These precautionary measures serve a two-fold purpose – to prevent individual infections and to avoid the unnecessary propagation of a potential pandemic. The latter addresses something less concrete, but perhaps more important. While one’s “odds” of becoming very ill or dying from COVID-19 might be minimal on a personal level, a cavalier approach to disease prevention and control could lead to great suffering and even death worldwide. If we could help prevent such a scenario, why would we not? To exercise appropriate caution here demonstrates our “love of neighbor” in a significant way.

What does this mean for us in the Diocese of the South, especially during this season of increased focus on gathering in worship?

I offer the following guidelines as a starting point for each community in our diocese during this season of heightened concern:

- It is an article of faith that the Holy Eucharist is received for the “healing of soul and body,” therefore nothing should change in regards to its reception.
- A common sense, and perhaps more aggressive, approach should be employed to cleanse parish facilities and objects with which parishioners come into regular contact throughout the week. I leave it to each rector or priest-in-charge to work with their parish councils to devise an approach that works best.

214-522-4149
office@dosoca.org

- There is every reason to believe that this virus *can* be transmitted by regular, human-to-human contact such as a fraternal greeting, veneration of holy objects, kissing the priest’s hand and partaking in a shared “zapifka” cup. Therefore, I encourage communities to modify their practices ***as appropriate based on news related to the spread of the virus in their cities and towns***. If a state or municipality in our diocese is on heightened alert because of an increase in the number of recorded cases of the virus, it is imperative that we take note and swiftly implement measures to inhibit the spread of the virus.
- If a situation is deemed “critical” by the CDC or other health authority in a state or municipality in our diocese, it might be necessary to temporarily adjust service schedules – diocesan leadership should be consulted in such cases (beginning with your dean).
- During this period of heightened awareness, parishioners who exhibit symptoms of the virus such as a fever, cough or shortness of breath should seek medical attention (***please, beloved, err on the side of caution***), and remain home until these symptoms have been treated and subside.
- During this period of heightened awareness, clergy who exhibit symptoms of the virus should make arrangements for a supply priest or (in cases of necessity) arrange for lay-led services.
- Recognize there are many in our parishes and missions (and indeed in our neighborhoods and among our friends) who may be impacted in tangible ways even if not sickened by the virus. Work disruption and the resulting loss of income, isolation at home due to any quarantine that might come, and/or simply the general anxiety many are feeling can have significant impact, particularly among single people and the elderly. I ask that clergy and faithful be particularly mindful of these impacts (*viz.* James 2.14-16), and to act concretely to render aid.

Finally, I commend each of you to act rationally in every scenario. This is not a season of trial in which to test one’s piety through unreasonable faith, but to focus on the greater good of our neighbors, acting with a heightened awareness that our behaviors might impact others. Please work through your dean and diocesan leadership to address any particular concerns not covered here, and I will let you know if there are further directives.

Wishing you strength for the fast, I am
Yours, in Christ,



+ALEXANDER
Bishop of Dallas and the South

