



March 17, 2020

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
2 I will say[a] to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."
3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. (Ps.91: ff)*

To the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania

Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever! In light of the Statement of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America March 17, 2020, and after consultation with the clergy of the diocese who met in teleconference with me today, it is my decision that in order to comply with Federal, State and local recommendations, and most importantly, out of our love and care for one another, we will not hold public services in our parishes until April 1 at the earliest. The welfare of our laity, especially those at higher risk of infection, is of the greatest concern to myself and the priests and deacons of the diocese. And as hierarch I am concerned about the health of the clergy, whose service to their parishes is dependent upon their well-being, so with great difficulty and sadness I have made this decision.

I wish to do all in my power, together with our clergy, however, to maintain active pastoral care of our people, through prayers and through the parish communities under the direction of the Rectors and parish councils. To that end, I have blessed the parishes listed below to offer services with "skeleton crews" of singers and servers not to exceed ten people inclusive. These services will be live-streamed for the benefit of all our diocese. Admittedly, not all have such access, but perhaps family and parishes may be able to assist. In my discussion with the clergy today I directed them to remain in regular phone contact with their parishioners and direct the laity to do likewise with fellow parishioners. Additionally, clergy from non-live streaming parishes are exploring other technological avenues to provide contact with parishioners, whether for prayer online, or Bible study or classes. Similar possibilities can be explored for church school also. We will also ask our Christian Education Coordinator to identify resources for children's activities, like online museum and zoos.

His Grace, Bishop Alexis offered the following counsel to the Holy Synod as we wrestled with this matter:

*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*

We are at present speaking about temporary measures for two weeks. People have vacations for longer periods of time. Not so long ago, people would commune once a year. I fail to see how two weeks of closed churches is something too much for people to bear, especially for people who love their neighbor as themselves.

If one life, if one parishioner, is saved because of stricter measures, shouldn't we all have enough love to sacrifice even our own spiritual needs for that soul for two weeks?

It is unthinkable that the servants of our Lord, Who healed "all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" could be less prudent regarding the physical well-being and health of those in their charge than the civil authorities.

Forgive me. +Bishop Alexis

As I write this we are concluding the Feast of St. Patrick of Armagh who drove the snakes out of Ireland, symbolic of the powers of evil. Through his intercession may our land and people, and all lands and peoples be freed from the evil of this pandemic.



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"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." Augustine

Further details on live-streaming services will be posted once the schedule has been determined. I want to thank you for your longsuffering in all of this. It is uncharted territory for all and we are seeking to do what is best for all while feeding the sheep entrusted to us. Be assured of my love, the love of your clergy and our desire to serve you as we go through this difficult time together.

Yours in Christ,

+ Mark

+ MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

CC: His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, Archbishop of Washington and Metropolitan of All America and Canada

Diocesan Clergy

The following parishes will work on live streaming the Divine Liturgy and other services:

St. Mark, Wrightstown

St. Stephen Cathedral, Philadelphia

St. Nicholas, Bethlehem

Holy Cross, Williamsport

Holy Trinity, Wilkes Barre

Holy Assumption, Philadelphia

Other streaming services may be found here: <https://orthodoxsandiego.org/streaming>