



Office of the Metropolitan

312 Garfield Street

Johnstown, PA 15906

March 12, 2020

Protocol No. 7/2020

God is with us!

Dear Reverend Clergy and Faithful Laity of the Diocese,

I am writing to you today with a sense of urgency, as we confront the new Covid-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic that is potentially affecting not only our physical and spiritual health but also our way of life in the United States of America. If you have turned on the television, listened to the radio, or followed the announcements on your phones for the last three weeks or so, you would think that the world is coming to an end. Local public and private schools are shutting down for several weeks. Professional sports leagues are suspending their schedules. Colleges and universities are closing down their on campus activities and doing everything on-line for the remainder of the spring semester. Even the NCAA Men's and Women's Basketball March Madness Tournaments have been cancelled. What will we do for the next three weeks without our madness? How about going to Church and observing Great Lent in a more meaningful way.

Several Priests and lay people have contacted the Chancery and/or me personally asking for some guidance/directives on what to do as we deal with this current health issue. Some have even offered their own suggestions. Various Christian Churches, Roman Catholic and Protestants, have made pronouncements concerning the Coronavirus. Some of the Orthodox jurisdictions here in the United States and others around the world have made pronouncements encouraging their faithful.

Here are my thoughts and directives concerning this issue:

- 1) Anyone who is not feeling well should refrain from attending Church services until they are feeling better. Stay home. There is no need to put others at risk. This is to protect both the person who is ill and those who are not. Those at home can view Church services via the Internet on our Diocesan website (www.acrod.org) or say their prayers at the home's prayer corner.
- 2) Parishes should provide hand sanitizers in the Narthex of the Church for the faithful to use prior to entering the Nave of the Church. Hand washing (warm water and soap) is also critical.

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- 3) Venerating of icons and the hand cross is usually with a kiss. At this time it might be prudent to reduce or eliminate these activities. It is very difficult for me to tell a faithful individual who for many years has kissed these religious items to stop. It is a personal choice. If you wish to kiss an icon and/or the cross, go ahead. If you choose not to, just bow.
- 4) The Kiss of Peace which is observed in many of our Diocesan parishes should be avoided. Instead, at the appropriate time, parishioners should acknowledge each other with a bow.
- 5) Parishes should celebrate all Church services as usual. There is no need to cancel any of our opportunities to be with our God in His house. Worshipping Him. Thanking Him. Asking for His assistance in our time of need.
- 6) The Eucharist will be distributed as usual. Parishioners are reminded to approach the Chalice with their mouths wide open, in order to receive the Body and the Blood of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ. This gift from God is the medicine of our lives. Either we believe that indeed it is the Body and the Blood of Christ or we don't. In the Orthodox understanding it is and so the Eucharist cannot ever be a vector/method/way of illness or death.
- 7) Anointing with oil should be with individual cotton-tipped swabs or individual cotton balls.
- 8) Various items such as antidoron, flowers, palms, pussy willows, etc. should be distributed as usual. It might be helpful if the Priest quickly sanitizes his hands just prior to the distribution.
- 9) Following Church services a thorough cleaning and disinfecting should be performed on all exposed surfaces (for example door knobs, candles stands, liturgical items, etc.).

As we move forward additional directives may be announced if necessary, however as a minimum these are to be followed by all the parishes in our Diocese. Let us not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by this current stress in our lives. Focus on Great Lent as we journey towards Pascha.

“But the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you: do not be afraid, nor be terrified.” (Deut. 31:8)

Working in His Vineyard with much love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+Metropolitan Gregory".

+Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

This Protocol is to be placed in all weekly bulletins or copies made available to all parishioners. In addition, Priests should read it at the end of Church services on the first Sunday following its arrival.

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