



Letter to the Community Regarding COVID-19 and Liturgical Services

Dear Faithful of the Annunciation Cathedral, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In an instant, the world has changed: all of us are feeling heightened anxiety as we face this most dreadful pandemic and as we comply with directives by Federal, State and City officials, as well as those of our Metropolis, our Archdiocese and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

We at the church are adapting to these rapidly evolving directives. As all of us, one way or another, are in high risk categories, we need to continue to shelter in place, as we've been told to do. For this reason, the Cathedral will remain closed for the foreseeable future.

While the Cathedral building may be closed, the Church is very much alive. The κατ' οἶκον ἐκκλησια—the church at home—is not only alive; it is thriving. Suddenly, we are being transported to a time when, whether during the persecutions in the early Church or those of the last century, Christians were hunkered down at home. Through prayer, they continued to be united with one another, in faith, in God. We are given this reassurance by the Psalmist, who wrote: My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven, and earth, Ἡ βοήθεια μου παρὰ Κυρίου τοῦ ποιήσαντος τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν (Psalm 120/121:2). For, in times of distress we have nowhere else to turn, but to God, *from whom our help comes*.

Let us not lose faith. If anything, let us seize this opportunity to strengthen it. Let us gather before our icons, at home, and let us pray. Let us call or FaceTime one another and encourage one another. In accordance with our Metropolis guidelines, Christo Pappademos, our Pastoral Assistant, and I will offer the Divine Services, however simplified, for as long as we are able to do so. We will be praying that God may avert this pestilence from among us. How long it will be

before the pandemic is gone is unknown. It may take months. What we do know is, we will endure, we will survive, and, as St. Paul wrote to the Christians at Thessalonike, we take comfort in the knowledge that God will not abandon us. *We shall always be with the Lord*, he says. *Therefore* (he adds) *comfort one another with these words* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

For now, we are planning to serve the Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings and also on March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, from 10 am. until 11 am. For Holy Week (April 13 through April 18), the usual services will all begin at 10 am, rather than in the evening. Please note that the church will otherwise be closed. We have been directed: no one else will be permitted to attend. You may follow the services through streaming- to stream these services, go to: <https://www.annunciation.org/live-stream>. In the words of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America: *In this way, we may be able to keep our liturgical tradition alive, even in this minimal way, but also that we may broadcast through streaming and other means the aforementioned services for the spiritual benefit of our faithful.*

In the words of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: *Perhaps some of you feel that these drastic measures undermine or harm our faith. However, that which is at stake is not our faith—it is the faithful. It is not Christ—it is our Christians. It is not the divine-man— but human beings. Have courage. And may God be with us!*

I close with the words of His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco, who was with us last Sunday and offered the special service asking God to protect us at this unprecedented time in the life of the world: *To say these are challenging times is an understatement. However, we must remain strong in our faith, and use this time when other worldly distractions are removed from our attention to instead focus on prayer, reading the Holy Scriptures, fasting, and truly prepare to receive the Crucified and Resurrected Christ into our lives on the Great Feast of Pascha!*

Sharing your pain and anxiety, but with resolve and hope in God, who loves us and who lay down His life for us, I remain,

Faithfully yours,

Rev. Stephen H. Kyriacou

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