



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

March 17, 2020
St Patrick of Ireland
No.

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To all clergy, monastics and laity of the Diocese of the Midwest,

The blessing of the Lord be upon you. The following is an update to the directives issued by the Holy Synod last week in response to the Coronavirus. The Holy Synod met yesterday to further discuss this situation and we are still deliberating on the guidance to give you on this crisis.

However I thought it important to at least give some direction as people are seeking that from me. All that I say is not motivated by fear for my own well being, or a lack of faith but for a concern and love for my brother. This air born virus has the ability to be passed on from person to person by people that could very well be symptom free. What has happened in countries like Italy could very well happen with this us if we don't take action now. This is what the medical people are saying. Not only that, the Central of Disease Control (CDC), issued guidelines yesterday that groups of 10 or more people should not be meeting. Given this I am issuing the following directive for the Diocese of the Midwest.

1. All social gatherings such as coffee hour, church school, adult education, and seminars and retreats are suspended.
2. Liturgical services may still be held but only with the priest and a small group of people of no more that ten. Should that number be exceeded, no one will be turned away, but the priest should remind those who attend of the risk they are taking in coming.
3. I am asking people to not attend services out of love for God and their brother so as to minimize the threat of passing on this virus.
4. In the case of funerals, rectors or priests in charge are to contact me for further direction.
5. All parishes (who have the ability) should live stream their services so people from home can be there to pray along with the so-called "skeleton crew."
6. Please do not neglect to support your stewardship responsibilities with the parish.
7. The usual pastoral duties of our clergy are to be carried out in the context of these guidelines (I.e. Confession, visitation of the sick, etc.).
8. All of the above measures are meant to be temporary.
9. These directives apply for the next two weeks effective March 17th and will only be impacted by any statement the Holy Synod releases in the next few days. After two weeks we will reassess the situation.

My beloved brothers and sisters, perhaps this is the time more than ever that we need to turn to the idea of the family as a little church to help us through this crisis. Have your families become a little church as you are called to be. We have put prayers for various services on the Coronavirus resources page of the Midwest Diocese website. Come to experience the breaking of bread at your meals as eucharistic events. Turn your homes into a “house of prayer.”

I am truly grieving over what is going on and have lost a fair amount of sleep over this. In fact I am writing this letter at 2 AM on March 17th. I know what I have shared with you will be disappointing to both clergy and lay and that I truly regret. But for me not to act in this manner I believe I would be causing more harm than good.

Please forgive me a sinner and pray for me,

With love in Christ,

The unworthy +Paul

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Paul". The plus sign is a simple cross, and the name "Paul" is written in a cursive, flowing script.

+PAUL

Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest
Orthodox Church in America

Cc. His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon