



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 16, 2020

***Alas for the day! For the Lord is near;
And as destruction from the Almighty, it comes. Joel 1:15***

Dear friends,

In Italy, two dangerously sick friends enter a hospital. The physician must choose to save one, and leave the other to die. His decision will be on his mind for the rest of his life. The spread of the novel coronavirus and what we have seen in other nations has been both extraordinary and swift. Even Greenland has reported a confirmed infection of the novel coronavirus. We have learned from other epidemics, including the Spanish Flu that wiped out one twentieth of the world population one hundred years ago. We know that we cannot stop the spread of the virus, but we can slow the spread. If we slow the spread of the virus, the health system will be able to treat those who are severely affected. If we do not slow the spread, we will experience what already has happened in other countries where physicians are forced to decide who will live and who will die. The University of California hospitals have been preparing for over a month, emptying as many beds as possible, and preparing for a massive influx of critically ill patients. Here in New Jersey, Holy Name Hospital in Teaneck has the largest number of acute cases, and the administration warns that the virus is unusually dangerous.

Today, the governors of New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut issued a unified order closing all restaurants and bars, casinos, gyms, and so on. They asked that there be no gatherings of any kind of 50 or more people. In New Jersey, the governor has ordered an 8 pm curfew for the general public. The governor of Pennsylvania just issued a similar order. Then the President asked that Americans not meet in groups larger than ten.

Last weekend, Cardinal Tobin closed all public services in the Archdiocese of Newark, and today, the Bishop of Paterson, New Jersey, followed his example. The bishops in Pennsylvania and New York are canceling public services. The Archdiocese of Washington DC cancelled all services last weekend. The Mayor of Passaic asked all religious leaders to cancel all public services without regard to the size of the service.

***“Yet even now,” says the Lord, “return to me with all your hearts,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
and tear your hearts and not your garments.” Joel 2:12***

Today I met with the College of Consultors of the Eparchy of Passaic. I thank the Consultors for their thoughtful advice and their consensus in making recommendations to me. I also consulted with our Metropolitan Archbishop William Skurla and a high ranking medical professional.

Beginning today, Monday, March 16, 2020 through Monday, March 30, 2020, all public liturgical services are cancelled in all of the churches of the Eparchy of Passaic. All educational programs are suspended except for online education. The priests will celebrate eucharistic services in private for their people where already scheduled. Because of the emergency, the priest is permitted to celebrate even if no one is in attendance. Priests are authorized to combine prayers for previously committed Mass stipends, or reschedule if it is more congenial.

BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC

Every subject of the Bishop of Passaic is dispensed from the Sunday obligation to attend the Divine Liturgy for March 22 and March 29. Divine law still requires us to keep holy the Lord's Day by prayer and avoiding unnecessary work. The Bishop cannot dispense from the Divine law.

The priests of the Eparchy of Passaic are working together to make Sunday Divine Liturgy available for you on the internet.

Baptisms, weddings, and funerals may be celebrated with only the immediate family present. People who are at high risk are encouraged not to attend. Confessions should be heard if possible with a screen and good ventilation.

Our churches may be open at designated times for people to spend time in private prayer. People are asked to follow public health guidelines at those times.

Experience has shown that the disease is mild or even unnoticed in the young and healthy, but everyone is asked to slow the spread of the virus for the sake of the weak and elderly among us.

Most of our churches are small, yet the people have always been both practical and generous. Although services are canceled, the bill collector is not canceling anything. Please remember that your parish still has to pay its bills, even if no one attends. In some parishes, the pastor may not be able to pay himself (and care for his children) by the end of this month if there is no collection. So remember to support your parish financially in the coming weeks, if at all possible. I realize that many of our people will also suffer financial loss, or even lose their jobs during this crisis. So I only ask that you support your parish if you are able.

During the next two weeks, we will find out whether the coordinated efforts of the American people are working, and it will be possible to make an informed decision about Holy Week and Easter. I thank everyone who has contacted me for their prayers, encouragement, and wise advice.

***"Be glad, O sons of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord, your God!
for He has given the early rain for your vindication...***

The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats overflow with wine and oil.

I will restore to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten." Joel 2:23-24

One of the lovely things about our ancient faith is that we do not make our journey to heaven alone. We support each other in every part of the journey, both in this life and the next. Together we pray for all those who will finish the race and claim the prize in the coming months, and we know that they will pray for us and encourage us from heaven.

On Ash Wednesday, our President and First Lady issued a message which I quote, "The imposition of ashes is an invitation to spend time during Lent fasting, praying, and engaging in acts of charity. This powerful and sacred tradition reminds us of our shared mortality, Christ's saving love, and the need to repent and accept the Gospel more fully. We join in prayer with everyone observing this holy day and wish you a prayerful Lenten journey. May you grow closer to God in your faith during this blessed season."

I commend all the people of the Eparchy of Passaic to the protection of the great Archangel Michael, to the gentle kindness of St. Joseph, and especially to the care of the all holy Mother of God.

Your servant,

+ Kurt

Most Rev. Kurt Burnette
Bishop of Passaic

