April 6, 2020

Protocol 20-07

The Reverend Clergy, the Monastics, 
and the Faithful Parishioners of 
the Holy Metropolis of Denver

Beloved in the Lord,

It has been said in recent days that the coronavirus and its associated impacts have turned our world upside down. This certainly is an appropriate characterization of our current situation. Some have become ill, even unto death; some have lost jobs and income; most have been isolated, and fear of the unknown has widely altered the lives of God’s people throughout the world. In the midst of this, our Church, which is normally a safe-haven and consistent presence for the faithful, is impacted in a most profound way.

This reality is painful and has been lamented widely by clergy and laity alike. Some may feel that any impact on the Church is unnecessary or an over-reaction. Personally, I have had great difficulty in applying restrictions to the normal function of our parishes. Recognizing that the Church provides a tangible meeting place between God and His creation, any limitation is nearly impossible to accept. However, as experts predict that the coming weeks of the pandemic may be some of the most difficult in this country, for the safety and sake of the people of this metropolis it is necessary that we take these extreme steps.

With this in mind, and consistent with the decisions of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops, I am providing the following directives to the priests and parishes of the Metropolis of Denver for the upcoming Holy Week, and which will remain in effect until further notice.

1. The divine services, including all of the prescribed Holy Week Services, shall continue to be conducted by the clergy, chanters, and necessary support, not to exceed five people in the church.
2. Where possible, services should be streamed on the internet for the faithful to pray from their homes.
3. None of the traditional material offerings are to be distributed to the faithful in any way, including palms and/or pussy willows, flowers, candles, and eggs, etc.
4. If a parish has purchased and/or prepared palm crosses, they are to be blessed in the traditional manner and kept to be distributed when distancing restrictions are lifted. If parishes have not obtained, or cancelled such orders for palms, the priest should perform the blessing service over similar greenery fashioned in the form of a cross.

5. The Holy Week Pre-Sanctified Liturgies may be celebrated and streamed online at the discretion of the parish priest.

6. The service of Holy Ueccion may be celebrated on Holy Wednesday and the sacrament saved for distribution when distancing restrictions are lifted. And/or, at the discretion of the priest, parishes may celebrate the Ueccion service as a community after distancing restrictions have been lifted.

7. On Holy Friday the funeral bier (kouvouklion) should be decorated simply to eliminate proximity issues inherent to having multiple people decorate it. Vases of flowers may be placed on the floor at the four corners.

8. The procession prior to the Lamentations on Holy Friday evening should be done with the priest carrying the epitaphio horizontally around the interior of the church.

9. On Holy Saturday night the Resurrection Gospel should be read from the center of the soleas.

10. Holy Communion shall not be offered, neither during specific times nor by appointment until further notice. The Church firmly asserts that the Eucharist is truly the Body and truly the Blood of Christ, and that no harm can come from it. However, to mitigate the risk of virus transmission to/from clergy or laity due to proximity, this is necessary.

Any priest failing to abide by these directives will be subject to ecclesiastical discipline.

It is true that our world has been turned upside down. Yet, we are called perhaps now more than ever, to be in this world, but not of this world. Indeed, our loving and merciful God, through His death on the Cross and third-day Resurrection, has conquered this fallen existence and prepared for His faithful a new heaven and a new earth. Despite our current challenges, let us no less joyfully celebrate His triumph over death, and proclaim emphatically as one Church family: Christ is Risen!

With paternal blessings,

+ Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver