16/03/2020

A Statement issued by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

بَطريَركِيَّة أنطاكِيَة وَسائِر المَشرق لِلرُّوم الأرثوذُكس
Patriarcat Grec-Orthodoxe d'Antioche et de tout l'Orient

Damascus, March 16, 2020

Since the beginning of this year, the world has been subjected to one of the most difficult temptations and health trials, inflicted by the spread of the COVID-19 (Corona) virus, which is sweeping over most countries, infecting tens of thousands of people and killing thousands of them.

Our Antiochian Church co-shares these great dangers that threaten human life today. Life is a God's "sacred gift" and each pastor and faithful is called to safeguard and preserve it in a way that pleases the Creator, according to His will and to the status of man as beloved and redeemed. The Church turns to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and all the saints, intensifying her prayers and clinging to "the hope that does not disappoint" (Rom. 5:5). As she faces this great tribulation, the Church relies on the "Divine providence" and aspires to have everyone be united in confronting this tribulation, having faith in this providence and working with it.

The findings of the scientific research, specialized concerned committees, and medical authorities confirm that limiting the number of gathered people and asking everyone to stay home is the most effective way to limit the spread of this virus and the number of its victims. Since the official authorities have called to restrict these gatherings, it has become imperative for the Church to gradually adapt, with great discernment, to the requirements of this period, in accordance with the

medical guidelines issued by the pertinent official authorities, as other social institutions are doing. Thereby, the Church gives a vivid example for her children to follow and apply necessary health measures to the fullest extent, thus realistically dealing with what humanity is going through, for the welfare of all.

Accordingly, and since the Church and society mutually embrace each other, and because she is asked, like all the social components, about participating in the endeavor to preserve health security, and since the Church understands, through her paternal pastoral care, the legitimate concerns of the believers in these extremely dangerous circumstances about having mass gatherings, she is asked to contribute in addressing the worries and pains of the consciousness of her children. Thus, in response to the scientific conclusions and the calls of official authorities, and in order to preserve the safety of all, our Antiochian Church, after consultation between His Beatitude and the Antiochian Hierarchs, declares the following:

• Adhering to all general preventive health instructions and measures announced by the state and relevant international organizations.

• Cancelling all private and public meetings.

• Cancelling all activities, such as festivals, excursions, events, exhibitions and competitions.

• Activating the possibility of online broadcasting of daily prayer services through the parish websites, provided that the parish priest performs the prayers and liturgy with the participation of the chanter and caretaker, without prohibiting the participation of any of the believers.

• In order not to deprive the believers from the Holy Eucharist, each church allocates specific times for the individual communion of those people who wish to receive it. Priests also offer communion to those who need it, such as the sick people and the elderly in their homes.

• Funeral services and memorials (third, ninth, fortieth and annual) are limited to the participation of the family of the deceased, without accepting condolences in halls.

• These procedures are applied temporarily and exceptionally until April 4th, 2020, provided that the Metropolitans follow up the implementation of these directives in light of the procedures that are successively taken by the civil authorities in the countries in which they serve.

Consequently, the Church calls on all believers to offer prayers and daily supplications in their homes, and with their family members, in order that we all share the great and one hope in God, in a time that reminds us of our human limitations.

Also, the Church invites her children to pray to the Lord God that He may have

abundant compassion on His people. May He grant healing to the sick and consolation to those tormented and suffering under the burden of these difficult days. May He inspire those who work in public affairs to deal with this crisis in wisdom and good management, and bless the efforts of the workers in the health and hospital sectors and all volunteers.

May the Lord God protect all our children and fellow citizens from all danger and evil.

Antioch Patriarchate/facebook