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Church of Greece hierarchs hold marathon session to decide on more, stricter measures to prevent Covid-19 exposure



The Holy Synod of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece convened today, until late into the afternoon, to consider additional measures, and possibly restrictions for cathedrals and chapels, in order to prevent peoples' exposure to the coronavirus.

Earlier, during wide-ranging meeting of all hierarchs, held at the Synodical assembly in downtown Athens, a trio of Metropolitans spoke out against an absolute closing of churches, including the Metropolitan of Piraeus, who emphasized that dozens of make-shift mosques in the greater Athens area, which cater mostly to third world migrants and would-be asylum seekers, should be the first to be shut down.

Others expressing reservations were the Metropolitans of Kifissia and Peristeri.

The Metropolitan of Peristeri merely noted that the final decision rests with the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, His Beatitude Ieronymos, along with members of the standing Holy Synod.

On his part, the Metropolitan of Kifissia said that if a closure order is given, it should affect all places of worship.

Infectious disease specialist and medical professor Sotiris Tsiodras, who is coordinating the government's efforts to combat the coronavirus outbreak, was summoned to brief Church hierarchs, saying afterwards that "…we presented the situation as is and how it is manifesting around the world, along with the danger of mass assemblies of people who belong at-risk group … we await the decision by the hierarchs; there was complete understanding by most of them."

In a related development, speaking with Archbishop Ieronymos by phone over the weekend, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis requested that the Church of Greece – the prevailing confession in the country – allow individual worship in cathedrals and only a bare minimum of ecclesiastical services, even amid the current 40-day period of Great Lent.

In an interview published by the Athens Sunday weekly Proto Thema, Mitsotakis said he has requested and awaits cooperation by the Church of Greece to limit exposure to Covid-19.

Among others, he stated that "… allow me to be very sincere. We must restrict mass assemblies in churches. I believe everyone has the right, as I have, as well. The problem is the mass congregation of faithful in Churches. That is why I want the help and cooperation of the Church."