

Covid-19 outbreak: Greek govt orders closure of all places of worship in country until March 30, for all but 'personal worship'



Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Monday evening abruptly announced that his government has ordered the closure of all places of worship in the east Mediterranean country until March 30, for all but 'personal worship', as part of even stricter measures to reduce exposure to the coronavirus outbreak.

In a post on the Greek prime minister's Twitter account, he stated that "... based on a government decision, all services are suspended for all places of religious worship, for every confession and every religion. Churches will remain open for individual worship. The protection of public health requires clear-cut decisions."



The decision came roughly an hour after the Holy Synod of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece announced that ecclesiastical services would be severely curtailed, leaving only a “very basic” Divine Liturgy to be celebrated between 7 and 8 a.m. each Sunday, while allowing personal worship by the faithful.

The announcement by the permanent Holy Synod said cathedrals and chapels in the overwhelmingly Christian Orthodox country would remain open for “personal worship”, while at the same time requesting that all of the faithful, particularly those in high-risk groups, remain in their residence in order to significantly reduce possible exposure to the Covid-19 virus.

Hierarchs of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece had convened for more than five hours, under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, His Beatitude Ieronymos, to deliberate over stricter measures to limit any further coronavirus exposure. The wide-ranging session was attended by hierarchs who are not Holy Synod members, namely, by Metropolitans in the greater Athens area, all of whom were briefed by the government’s coordinator for the Covid-19 crisis: infectious diseases Prof. Sotiris Tsiodras.

Before the closure order was handed down by the government, the Holy Synod prescribed a very “basic” Divine Liturgy to be celebrated on Sunday, beginning on March 22, and until the Saturday of Lazarus, on April 11. Another exception, before the blanket ban, was on March 25, on the Feast Day of the Annunciation.

The Holy Synod had called on the flock to feel and act as if they are carriers of the coronavirus, in bid to emphasize that exposure to others in public places must be avoided at all costs.

The government decision, which was published on Tuesday, affects all places of worship of all faiths, not just those of the Orthodox Church, and extends to monasteries and pilgrimage tours.