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Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA issues statement to the faithful on church attendance and best practices during the COVID-19 pandemic



The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America has released a statement to the faithful regarding church attendance and best practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Read the full text below:

> As Orthodox Christians, we are united in the sacraments and our teachings, but as human beings we are also united in our solidarity and suffering. Therefore, during this period of intensive prayer and spiritual discipline of Great Lent, the pandemic that our communities are facing throughout our nation and throughout the world obliges us to slow down and reflect on the way that we glorify God as well as the way that we

express compassion toward our brothers and sisters.

As disciples of the Lord, Scripture and our faith inform us that while we are not of the world, we are indeed in the world (1 John 2). This means that we participate fully and simultaneously in both the heavenly and earthly life. As a result, we are at the same time sustained by God's grace and yet still susceptible to worldly affliction. Thus, without wavering in our faith – which we believe casts out fear through love – we must nevertheless take every precaution to protect ourselves and our neighbors from untimely suffering and death. This is a vital dimension of our command to love and care for one another.

Therefore, responding to the rapid spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus), and as your Bishops and Spiritual Fathers, we must be very clear and emphatic about one thing: it is not a sin to refrain from church services or sacraments during this time of pandemic. There is no doubt that the Church is the Body of Christ. However, it is the same community both within the walls of the sanctuary and beyond. We have always preached and believed this; now is the proper time that we are also called to practice it.

Furthermore, we implore you to proceed together with us as one community in solidarity – Bishops, clergy, laity, neighbors, and civil servants – during this time of crisis. We must all obey the instructions of the medical professionals and State authorities and follow all the prescribed preventive measures in order to protect ourselves and others.

We urge you to work together for the spiritual and physical healing of all, both for the salvation of the world and the restoration of the world. This will be our unique spiritual struggle during the days that lie ahead, as we journey through difficulty and darkness toward the Life and Light of the Risen Christ.

May God bless, comfort, and strengthen you all.