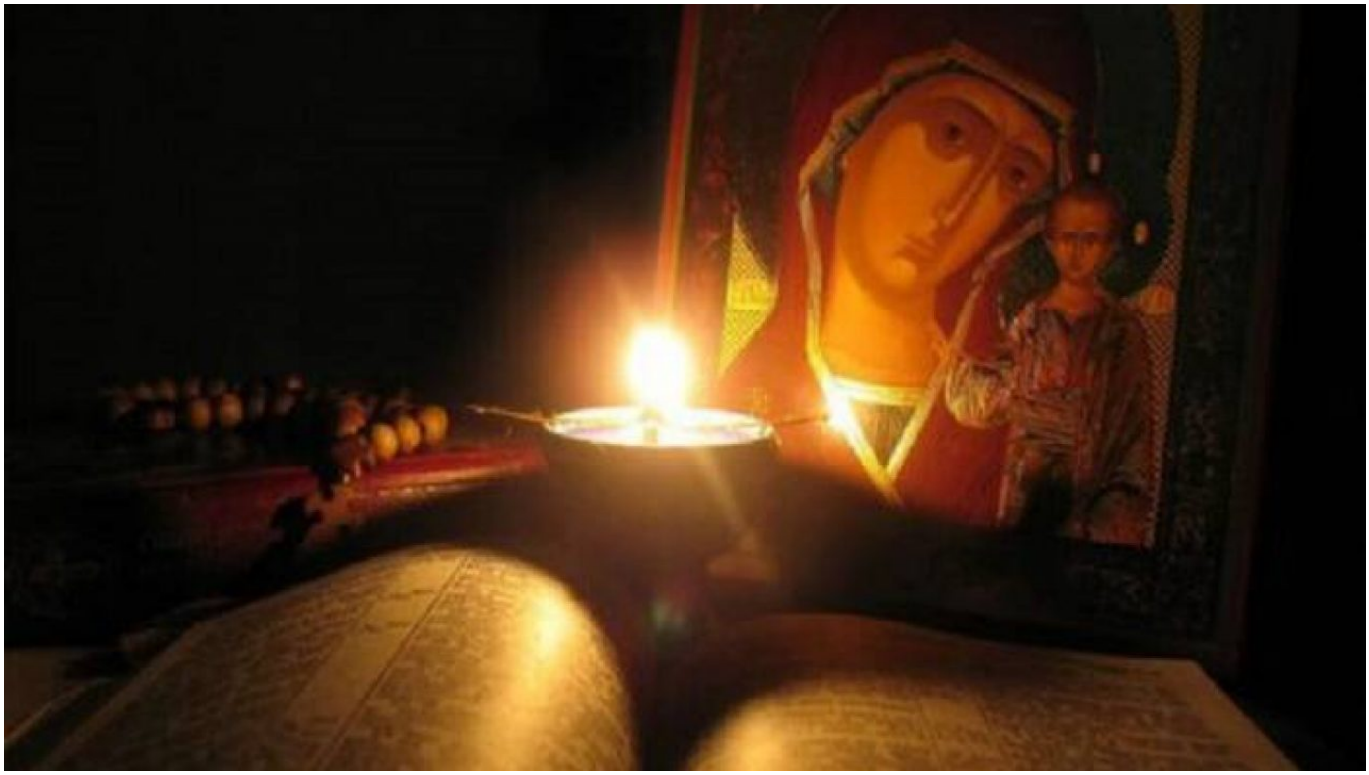
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Orthodox Church heed Covid-19 guidelines, directives of public health officials around the world



Orthodox Churches around the world continued their very active role to reduce the general public's exposure to the Covid-19 outbreak. Orthodoxy's Patriarchates, Autocephalous Churches, Archdiocese, Metropolises and monasteries have been diligently cooperating with state officials, as well as encouraging the faithful to follow public health authorities' guidelines and directives.

On his part, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, His All Holiness Bartholomew I, issued a videotaped message to the flock regarding the coronavirus pandemic, stressing that the Church cannot be absent from this latest and grave tribulation faced by humanity.

On Wednesday, the Ecumenical Patriarchate decided to close all churches and monasteries under its ecclesiastical jurisdiction around the world, instructing Church officials to suspend liturgies and services until March 29, except for personal worship and prayer.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate also instructed the Patriarchal monasteries to continue their services for their brotherhood, but without allowing the presence of the public. The decision will be reviewed depending on the progress of the pandemic.

On the semi-autonomous monastic community of Mt. Athos, in northern Greece, elders and monks continued holding litanies and prayer vigils to plea for humanity's protection from the coronavirus outbreak and the speedy recovery of those afflicted.

On his part, the Archbishop of Australia, His Eminence Makarios, issued a new encyclical regarding the coronavirus outbreak and the additional measures taken by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, noting that as of Wednesday the Archdiocese's Churches will remain closed to the faithful.

However, all services, the feast days of the saints, and the Divine Liturgies will be conducted by a priest and a chanter. The Archbishop announced that sacraments and funerals will continue to take place but only in the presence of immediate family members.

Makarios noted that "…During these difficult times for all of humanity and especially for our country Australia, I urge you to show understanding, unity and confidence both in the Leadership of our nation and towards our Holy Archdiocese. I call upon you all to pray more. I ask that you place your trust in God. It is a trial that we are experiencing, but we Orthodox know very well that after the Crucifixion comes the Resurrection."

In southeast Europe, the Metropolitan Bishop of Montenegro and the Littoral, His Eminence Amphilochios, issued a message of unity and hope, in the face of the difficult hours faced by humanity and his Adriatic nation. His Eminence instructed clerics during the holding of the Divine Liturgy and Services to read out a specific intercession for an end to the pandemic.

Finally, the Orthodox Church of Romania has offered accommodations to

people in quarantine for the coronavirus, while Orthodox nuns in the Metropolis of Timisoara and Vanatu have been instructed by the Metropolitan to aid state authorities at border entries, as thousands of Romanians working in western Europe are returning to their homeland.