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Bulgarian Orthodox Church to hold Easter 2020 services outside churches



The Bulgarian Orthodox Church will hold its 2020 Palm Sunday and Easter services outside churches, it emerged after a meeting between Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev, operational headquarters chief Major-General Ventsislav Mutafchiyski and the church's governing body on March 30.

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church, to which the majority of the country's citizens claim adherence, has been roundly criticised on social networks for keeping its houses of worship open in spite of the Covid-19 crisis, although some of the church's leaders have called on people to pray at home instead of attending church, and the Sunday service at Alexander Nevsky cathedral is broadcast on public television and Facebook.

Criticism also has been levelled at the church for continuing the Eastern Orthodox Christian practices of people kissing icons in churches, and using shared spoons during communion services.

Prime Minister Boiko Borissov said this past weekend that even if the operational

headquarters recommended ordering the closing of churches, he would not endorse the recommendation. At previous briefings, Mutafchiyski said that closing churches was a matter for the church to decide.

The meeting with the Holy Synod took place more than a week after the operational headquarters said that it had requested it.

After the meeting, Mutafchiyski said that different spoons would be used during services and icons would be disinfected.

The Interior Ministry will be in charge of keeping order outside churches. People will be allowed to enter churches to light candles, but hygiene and sanitary precautions must be adhered to. Priests will be required to prevent crowding.

Services will be broadcast on television and social networks.

The Holy Synod is expected to post a statement followings its talks with Donchev and Mutafchiyski, and its own meeting to discuss the measures around Easter.

The national operational headquarters against Covid-19 said at a morning briefing on March 30 that the total number of people who had tested positive for the virus was 354, counting eight who had died and 15 who had recovered.

Bulgaria’s Parliament voted on March 13 a month-long State of Emergency. Measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 include the closure of shopping malls – except for food shops, pharmacies, banks, insurance and payment offices in them, the closure of cinemas, theatres, restaurants, bars and coffee shops, a ban on visiting public parks and gardens, and restrictions on intercity travel.

Bulgaria’s Chief Mufti, spiritual leader of the country’s Muslim minority, has cancelled Friday prayer services and urged Muslims to pray at home. The Roman Catholic and Protestant churches are streaming their services. The leadership of the Bulgarian Jewish community has closed Sofia Central Synagogue to visitors and suspended prayer services.

— Source: sofiaglobe.com