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Church of Greece, hierarchs, faithful demand end to closed churches in country – coronavirus restriction still in force



The next few days in Greece will determine when, and to what extent, Covid-19-related restrictions on the presence of worshipers in Churches will be relaxed or lifted completely.
Another nationally televised address by Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis is set for Tuesday afternoon, where he will reportedly unveil a “roadmap” to gradually lift restrictions on non-essential movement and public assemblies, given that Greece is now in a fifth week of a “lockdown”, the weather is balmy, and with coronavirus infections and fatalities very low compared to other European countries. At the same time, the Greek economy is forecast to suffer a major recession in 2020 due to restrictions imposed to contain the pandemic.

At the same time, the Church of Greece’s Holy Synod, Metropolitans, individual

priests and many of the faithful in the predominately Christian Orthodox country are stepping up pressure and uniting their voices to demand an easing of restrictions in place regarding places of worship.

The Church and many faithful now demand the right to exercise individual worship in cathedrals and chapels around the country, even if this means just lighting a candle and praying.

A very high-prolife “mobile concert”, from atop a truck bed, on Saturday afternoon through downtown Athens, including a stop outside the prime minister’s office and with the premier looking on from the sidewalk, irked many Christians in the country — given that Orthodox churches were ordered closed to the faithful during Great and Holy Easter Week, leaving only priests and cantors to celebrate the great services and Divine Liturgies.

A day earlier, the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, His Beatitude Ieronymos, sent a letter to the country’s relevant education and religious affairs minister, requesting that cathedrals and chapels be allowed to reopen, while using unequivocal language to press home the Church of Greece’s position.

The letter was first approved by members of the Church of Greece’s Permanent Holy Synod, as reports by the Orthodoxia news agency cited the fact that His Beatitude called each hierarch and read out the letter for their approval.

The influential Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece wants the prohibition on worshipers in places of worship to be lifted before this week’s Holy Synod meeting.

The reaction also comes, according to reports, to an effort to prevent any extension of the restrictions through mid to late May.

The Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece has already announced that the Holy and Great Easter Resurrection service will be celebrated during the commemoration of the Apodosis of Pascha, over the evening of May 26 to May 27.

The next permanent Holy Synod meeting is set for Thursday in Athens.

In announcing the session, the Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, His Eminence Ierotheos, emphasized that “…during Holy Week we made a tremendous effort, and now it’s sad to hear that, for instance, hair salons will open, but not our churches”.

On its part, the association of Orthodox clerics in Greece issued a stinging announcement, expressing its condemnation of the closure cathedrals to the faithful, as well as the affront, as it said, of a “concert on wheels” at the same time

when places of worship remained closed to worshippers.

The announcement stated “…this was the drop of poison that caused the vessel to overflow, with the result being that we and our brothers in the laity feel that an anti-Christian, anti-Church zeal exists in the intensions of some – one that appears under the cloak of progress and rationalism.”

In its intervention, the Autocephalous Church of Crete’s Holy Synod issued a unanimous decision, conveyed to the prime minister and relevant minister, calling for the need for holy cathedrals to again open their doors.