

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America - Parishes respond to COVID-19



The Covid-19 Pandemic has forced people around the world to make changes to their everyday lifestyle and, as a result, has greatly affected the way Greek Orthodox parishes and parishioners offer and participate in worship.

Following the guidelines from the U.S. government, and for the protection of the clergy and faithful, in mid-March the Holy Eparchial Synod directed that all parishes hold services with only clergy and chanters, while closing the doors to the faithful. As the coronavirus outbreak intensified just a few weeks before Pascha, parishes around the country adjusted by offering virtual on-line services in order to continue with prayer and community.

Many parishes already offered live-streaming services, however some had to scramble to secure a camera, update streaming capacity with their internet provider and determine what platforms to use, YouTube, Facebook Live and/or their website.

The Department of Internet Ministries of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese helped parishes across the country transition to on-line worship in time for Holy Week Services. One of those parishes is Archangels Church in Stamford, CT. Before

COVID-19, Rev. Fr. Harry Pappas never really thought about setting up live-stream, but in February and March 2020, as the pandemic began to worsen, Fr. Pappas and the Parish Council put the wheels in motion. With one security camera in the church and with knowledgeable IT help, that single camera was moved into place at the back of the church, and a live-stream was added to their website. Another camera was set up separately for Facebook Live, allowing two different camera angles for viewers to choose from. Internet Ministries also helped with improvising and improving the sound quality and securing cables and adapters. Fr. Pappas says that while he is not technologically savvy, he is glad to be able to offer parishioners and faithful from across the country the opportunity to worship from home.

Community members of Archangels continue to be informed on all fronts through an email listserv that had already been in place. Fr. Pappas charged the GOYAns with teaching the elderly members of the parish how to manage tablets and I-pads and the community offers 5 tablets, with internet, for borrowing. Fr. Pappas is holding Parish Council meetings, GOYA meetings and Bible Studies through Zoom so that the critical work of the parish continues.

An important service project of Archangels Church is the preparation and delivery of meals to shut-ins. More than 25 people per week are receiving a delivery of food from a local business, which is sponsored by a benefactor. This project offers free meals while also supporting struggling local businesses. On Holy Saturday more than 120 "Greek" Easter style meals were delivered! Also unique to the parish, Fr. Pappas is offering "social distance" family blessings. He visits homes to offer a blessing from outside the door, sprinkling Holy Water and praying for the family and community, who has lost a number of people to the coronavirus.

When asked about what he envisions when the faithful are able to return, Fr. Pappas believes that they will be cautious and abide by government guidelines for a slow return to "normalcy". While the community has adjusted to on-line worship, he is heartened to hear from so many that they "really miss being around the church for fellowship, education and divine services."

Traveling south, to Naples, FL, St. Katherine Church had been live-streaming for some time before Covid-19. As the coronavirus forced major changes to church life, Rev. Fr. Philimon Patitsas connected with parishioners by ending services with a personal and heartfelt sermon, followed by a "virtual" coffee hour. He said, "I am very proud of what we are doing here at St. Katherine Church. We, as Greek Orthodox can be proud. We responded to this crisis." With the motto of the U.S. Marines to - improvise, adapt, overcome - we continue to brainstorm about what more we can do. If the problem is a perceived lack of connection and relevance in

the church, the way to overcome this is to supply the faithful with ways to connect and to strive for excellence. “

Using Zoom, Fr. Philimon offers a daily 9 a.m. prayer service. On the Saturday of Lazarus a Zoom demonstration showed participants how to make a palm cross and on Agape Sunday, also using Zoom, the Gospel was read in 15 different languages. Other Zoom uses by the parish include holding Parish Council, Philoptochos and GOYA meetings and chanting lessons and story time for JOY/HOPE. Fr Patitsas says that by using Zoom the church has overcome many boundaries and that the YouTube and Facebook streams have reached thousands and thousands of people around the world. He said that the ability of viewers to “light a candle” virtually has also helped the parish.

When asked what he envisions when the faithful can return to the Church building, Fr. Philimon says, “When our faithful return to St. Katherine, palms and flowers from Holy Saturday will await them. I envision a very great expression of emotional joy! We will be delighted to be back in our church.”

[Source](#)