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## **Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America - Pastoral Letter from His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH for the Ecclesiastical New Year**



Metropolitan JOSEPH

September 1, 2020

Beloved Faithful in Christ,

Greetings and blessings to you and your loved ones in the Name of our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

As we begin a new ecclesiastical year, I write to offer my heartfelt and fervent prayers to our Lord, that He will bless us all abundantly with His grace and love for mankind: healing the sick, comforting the afflicted, guiding those in spiritual and

civil authority, strengthening those ministering unto others, pacifying the nations, and bringing unity to our fractured society.

Although this past year has presented us with many difficulties, we have also seen countless acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, kindness and generosity. When we needed to limit the numbers of faithful in our churches, our parishes responded with using technology to broadcast the services as well as making creative use of the space available and increasing the number of services to accommodate more people.

When we needed to close the camping programs this summer, the staffs of our camps did an unprecedented and excellent job reaching the youth through virtual programs – this year I even heard much positive feedback from parents who got to experience a taste of what their children do at camp through this medium. I also learned that our Antiochian Village counselors, realizing the financial difficulties the camp faced this summer, took the initiative to donate and fundraise – bringing in \$35,000! These situations have been far from ideal, but I am proud of the clergy and faithful of our God-protected Archdiocese!

We do see some hopeful signs that the surge in case numbers we saw during the summer is subsiding, but we should continue with common sense precautions as we enter the fall months. We ask our pastors and parish councils to do their due diligence in remaining up to date on all the local health guidelines and regulations. Our previous directives remain in force in this Archdiocese, and they must be applied and interpreted within the framework of your local conditions.

Regarding our Sunday schools, our preference is to remain cautious about in-person gatherings. If a parish is in an area where there is limited transmission and the schools have opened, we grant our blessing to open if the parish can abide strictly to the CDC guidelines for schools and any relevant local regulations. We would recommend waiting to begin in-person instruction until the end of September to gauge the success of the local schools in reopening. All our parishes, however, have our blessing to continue with online instruction for the youth.

Parishes may continue to have in-person parish council and organizational meetings, Bible studies, etc. of small groups with appropriate precautions. Again, parishes should be mindful of their local conditions and policies in making these decisions. Any fundraisers, coffee hours, or food service should continue to be curbside pick-up and individual serving containers, following the public health guidelines in your area. We also recommend using the fall months to plan your gatherings outdoors as much as practicable.

We will not be able to have annual parish meeting in-person this fall. These meetings can be held virtually, and we encourage parishes that have their elections during their fall meetings to explore online or mail-in methods of voting. Any questions may be sent to our chancellor, Archdeacon Emile Sayegh - [\[email protected\]](#).

I would like to remind our faithful that we are continuing to collect donations to alleviate the suffering of our brothers and sisters in Christ affected by the explosion in Beirut. We are working in close cooperation with His Eminence Metropolitan Elias of Beirut and Dean Triantafilou of IOCC to ensure all the donations are distributed quickly and effectively to those in need. If you have not yet contributed to this worthy cause, please do so as soon as possible by visiting our website here.

Our church year ends in celebration of the falling asleep of our All-Holy Lady, the Theotokos, and the new one begins with the celebration of her nativity. I call on all of our faithful to offer fervent intercessions to the Theotokos as we close this difficult year marked by pandemic, tension, and violence. May she, as the Joy of All Who Sorrow and Champion Leader, bring spiritual joy in the midst of these worldly tribulations and lead us to days of peace, health, salvation, visitation and furtherance in all good things.

With prayerful best wishes for a blessed and grace-filled new year, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,

+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

[antiochian.org](http://antiochian.org)