

Church candles more important than mental health helpline for some, say clerics



Calls to open our churches at Victorian Multicultural Commission consultation

Months have passed since we experienced our 'virtual Easter', however the global COVID-19 pandemic continues to keep churches empty.

Father Evmenios Vasilopoulos, the Archdiocesan Vicar of the Northcote district, made a plea to the government to consider opening churches so that worshippers can gather for the benefit of their mental health. He said that for a number of churchgoers lighting a candle was more important than calling a government 'helpline'.

At the community consultation held by the Victorian Multicultural Commission on Friday, he distinguished the difference between large Easter gatherings and the much smaller church services churchgoers usually attend. He said it would be possible to allow five, ten, fifteen or even twenty parishioners in for a service that would offer solace.

Neos Kosmos recently spoke to Father George Athanasiadis from St Spyridon,

Clayton, who said he understands the reason for COVID-19 restrictions but added that he encountered “heartbreaking moments and pleas of people asking for an exception so that they could light a candle and have communion,” he said, adding it has not been easy for him.

He says he can pray, “especially for young people who have mental health problems, who have come and seen you.”

He receives around 50 telephone calls a day from people who say, “Father, what will happen? Will we be without church again this week?”

“Someone called me the other day, a person aged 55, a good child, parent and cried,” he said.

“Son, what can I do? Sit at home, pray, drink some Holy Water and be patient as we all are.”

[Source](#)