

SPECIALLY TRAINED PRIESTS VISIT 100S OF CORONAVIRUS PATIENTS IN MOSCOW REGION



The Moscow Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church has 20 specially trained priests who are available around the clock to go visit coronavirus patients in the hospital.

This special ministry was recently discussed at the 14th Assembly of the Russian World, which generally discussed online religious social projects in the context of the coronavirus pandemic and self-isolation, reports the Russian Church's Department for Church Charity and Social Work.

The usual style of hospital chaplaincy, which the Church has been developing for years, was swept away all in one week back in March, explained Natalia Shakuro, the coordinator of the Moscow Diocese's Commission for Hospital Ministry.

As little was known about COVID at the time, volunteers and chaplains were initially blocked from visiting hospitals. The Church reacted quickly, and within a week it had created a group of 18 priests who would visit patients at home to serve them the Sacraments.

"Patients also asked to communicate with priests in online messengers, because

it's uncomfortable to talk in hospital rooms. We also tried to promptly respond to this request," Shakuro noted.

The Moscow Diocese's Hospital Commission also established a 24-hour hotline that patients can call to request Confession, Unction, and Communion, whether at home or in the hospital. From April 2 to November 11, the priests made 728 trips and visited 52 medical institutions in the Moscow region, visiting patients in special protective equipment.

Additionally, at the height of the pandemic, Bishop Panteleimon, the Chairman of the Synodal Department for Charity, and hospital chaplains conducted a series of online conversations the sick and isolated.

"We isolate ourselves from each other, from love, from charity, from helping each other. Our spiritual task is to help people overcome this self-isolation. The need for this is huge. Those who find themselves in hospital departments and intensive care units feel, first of all, loneliness, fear, and uncertainty. The role of priests and their assistants is to help people reconnect with God," explained Archpriest John Kudryavtsev, Deputy Chairman of the Commission for Hospital Ministry.

The Synodal Department receives 2-3 requests daily from dioceses requesting personal protective equipment for priests to visit sick patients. The Department has provided 700 sets thus far.

Since June 2020, more than 27,500 people in 42 dioceses have received food aid purchased with funds raised by the Synodal Department for Charity.

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