

Church of Greece hierarchs call for opening of churches during Christmas, New Year's



Members of the Holy Synod of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece will convene on Tuesday, via a teleconference format, in order to discuss the most recent pandemic-related restrictions issued by the Greek government – particularly those affecting Church-going and the holding of services with the presence of worshippers over the coming Christmas, New Year's and Epiphany celebrations.

Last week, the Greek government said only Christmas Day and New Year's Day services with the presence of the faithful will be allowed, and then, with a ceiling on the number of worshippers allowed, depending on a cathedral's indoor size.

The mandatory closing of places of worship in the overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian nation – despite the Church's pledge to adhere to all public health measures and recommendations – has generated sharp reactions and disappointment among hierarchs, clerics and much of the faithful.

The Metropolitan of Patras, His Eminence Chrysostomos, on Sunday reminded that

the Church is merely requesting the obvious during the Christmas season, whereas the state's recent decisions have added more hardship and disappointment to society's already gloomy mood, in the face of difficult conditions created by the pandemic.

From northern Greece, in his sermon, the Metropolitan of Ierissos, His Eminence Theoklitos, said the latest round of restrictions insult the Church.

In a disturbing development affecting the Metropolis of Mesogea and Lavreotiki, which is located east of the greater Athens area, police over the weekend proceeded with the arrest of a parish priest and laymen at the Koropi township, while also issuing a fine against the parish cathedral.

In an announcement, the Metropolis referred to "sinful legal measures", adding that the fine will be covered by its benevolent fund for the poor and needy.

The Metropolis also bemoaned the fact that the presbyter priest and the laymen were arrested outside the cathedral after the holding of a Divine Liturgy.

Still on the same subject, the Metropolitan of Demetriados and Almyros, in central Greece, His Eminence Ignatios, has addressed a letter to Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, asking the latter take personal responsibility to find a compromise over the issue of Church-going during the upcoming great religious services.

His Eminence said good reason must prevail, while he pointed to frameworks employed in other countries. He said "...In any case, worshipers for the New Year's Day service are not that many, but there are people who want to begin the New Year in Church, with Christ."