November 20, 2020

Ongoing COVID-19 Protocols of All Saints Canonsburg

Beloved members of our All Saints family,

We write to you today with hope and in fervent prayer that our Lord will continue to bless our parish, our local community, and free us from the deadly pandemic that has caused so many distractions in our lives and has rocked the very foundations of our livelihood over the past 8 months.

It has been difficult as your clergy, as your parish leadership team, and as fellow human beings to weather this storm and guide the faithful. We have been blessed with a very loving, caring, and pastoral shepherd in the person of His Eminence Metropolitan Savas of Pittsburgh. From the onset of this pandemic, His Eminence (working with his brother hierarchs) has taken all precautions seriously and has taken necessary action in keeping his flock, his children as safe as humanly possible. The burden of this for one man is more than anyone should be asked to endure. We thank His Eminence for his care and guidance.

Over the past 8 months, Metropolis policies have been distributed in a few different forms. First, we had the red phase, second, we had the very short-lived yellow phase, and now we find ourselves continuing forward through the green phase. Throughout all of these changes and various phases, the Metropolis has been very concise in its expectations and has blessed each parish to move forward through their compliance and obedience.

As a parish, we must adhere to, comply with, and enforce the policies set forth by our Metropolis. As your parish leaders, we have been entrusted to represent our Church family and to legislate for the good of all. We have prayerfully and thoughtfully discussed these matters at great length, understanding the obvious sensitivity of personal beliefs and the obedience we have as a local church to our hierarch. We have approached this matter from every angle, and have relied on the guidance of our government, our Metropolis, and our clergy to lead us toward resolution. This is a greatly difficult and troubling task.

In recent days the numbers throughout our region have had an uptick. This week, the state of Pennsylvania through its governor and the local authorities have asked us to be vigilant,
courteous, and live with a heightened sense of precaution. While the state has continued to warn us and to direct us, the policies of the Metropolis of Pittsburgh remain consistent with the state and remain in full effect.

That being said, we take this opportunity to remind all of you of some very important aspects of the policy and also to make a few announcements.

First and foremost, we remind everyone that if you are not feeling well, please do not come to church. This is the first precaution that one can take in protecting themselves and others.

At this time, (and for the time being) all in-person church school classes and coffee hours are suspended. With the closures of schools, the advisement against unnecessary gatherings, etc. we have taken these simple and understandable steps. We pray in the near future that we will be able to again offer these in their fullest form. We are looking into other means of offering continued faith-based education for our young people.

Prior to entry into the narthex, on the outer doors, clear signage has been posted stating the acknowledgement of the risks and responsibilities one takes upon themselves by entering into our facility. All documentation can be found under the COVID 19 section of our parish website and on the Metropolis website. Please familiarize yourselves again if you need to.

Upon entry into the narthex you are to sign yourself, family members, and guests in so that accurate attendance can be taken. In the event of an outbreak, we can then take proper steps in notifying those affected.

Temperatures will be taken by parish council members or narthex team members. While we understand that there are many telling signs of an illness, temperature taking is an extra line of defense in keeping everyone safe within the walls of our church. Those who arrive with a temperature of 100 degree or more will be asked to return home.

Upon entry into the narthex and facility, it is required by both State and Metropolis that all attendees be masked. There are very few exemptions to this policy.

According to the State of Pennsylvania.... the exemptions to the masking requirement that apply to our parish are as follows:

- Individuals who cannot wear a mask due to a medical condition, including those with respiratory issues that impede breathing, mental health condition or disability
- Individuals who would be unable to remove a mask without assistance
- Individuals who are under two years of age
• Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing-impaired or has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication

According to the Metropolis of Pittsburgh this is their continued policy in regard to masks:

• The masking policy applies to everyone - the only exemption is for those with a medical reason to not wear them (serving clergy and cantors are exempt from wearing masks during the service; before and after they must be masked).
• Clergy and Lay Leaders cannot "investigate" whether a claim of medical exemption is true (as we would likely trample on a citizen’s HIPAA rights). However, as Orthodox Christians, we pray that those claiming a medical exemption are doing so honestly as they enter the Lord’s house.
• The Metropolis states that there is no such person as a "conscientious objector" in Church - those who object should either properly wear their masks out of obedience or remain home.

Upon entry into the church, those who are not masked will be offered a mask. Anyone who objects without an exemption will be asked to return home or to worship downstairs where the service will be simulcast. Please note that at the time of Holy Communion, all will be welcome to approach with the fear of God, with faith and with love.

As you enter into the nave and make your way to your pew please be conscious to your surroundings. If you see a family member with whom you live or are constantly with, please move into that pew to allow for maximized spacing. If you are in a pew with people you have not been with, please keep distance of 6 feet between yourselves. Clear markings have been made as to what pews and areas of certain pews are off-limits. This is not the time to lay claim to “family pews”. We must all be flexible. Do not expect to come late and have “your pew” open to you.

We are blessed to have the St. Phanourios chapel and the choir area for additional seating. It is important that on a larger Sunday, people be willing to move to those areas. If you are asked by a member of the parish council or narthex committee to go to that area upon arrival, please do so. It is being asked of you for the safety of yourself and others.

As your parish leaders we commit that we will not disturb the sanctity of your worship experience. In return, we ask that you come to church willing and ready to comply with all policies. When necessary and put on the spot, we will enforce these policies.

We thank you for taking the time to read this and understand the spirit in which it’s being sent. We know that some may not agree with what is being presented, nevertheless these are the policies of the Metropolis of Pittsburgh and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
It is our fervent prayer that this pandemic be short lived and that we can grow as better human beings and Orthodox Christians because of it. We wish all of you and your loved ones a Happy Thanksgiving. Yes, this year has been difficult, but there are many blessings that we can continue to benefit from and must be thankful for!

Yours in Christ,

Fr. George L. Livanos, Proistamenos
Fr. George F. Athanasiou
& the Executive Member of the Parish Council