

# THE TRISAGION

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## The Work of the Church Continues



*Even though all services were indefinitely suspended on March 17, both worship locations—Holy Trinity in State College and the Chapel of the Holy Spirit in Beavertown—began holding Saturday “Open Houses” for personal prayer and devotion. On April 11 and 18, parishioners may pick up palms and have Paschal baskets blessed, respectively. If venturing out is impossible, contact the Parish Office at (814) 231-2855 to arrange to have palms dropped off or baskets blessed outside the door of your home.*

PARISH LIFE WAS UPENDED last month as the entire world grappled with a novel coronavirus known as “COVID-19.” Following guidance from federal and state officials, His Eminence Archbishop Melchisedek ordered the immediate cessation of all services, sacraments (Communion, Confessions, etc.), and social gatherings in the Archdiocese—the only exception was Saturday church openings for the “faithful to offer a private prayer and light candles” as long as social distancing practices were maintained. His Eminence’s directive was later modified to allow so-called “skeleton crew” liturgies behind locked doors on Palm Sunday and Pascha at the rector’s discretion; see Fr. Ignatius’ decision, next column). Despite these drastic measures, the work and mission of the parish continues even though its people cannot assemble.

*(continued, see THE WORK OF THE CHURCH, last page)*

## Solidarity this Holy Week and Pascha

IT IS WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY that I relate to you the most recent turn of events affecting our life as a community: I have decided that we will not be holding any Eucharistic worship services in the temple at Holy Trinity over the period of Holy Week this year. This same decision applies as well to services at the Chapel of the Holy Spirit. This decision, which I was led to by the wise counsel of the other parish clergy and of my spiritual father, is based primarily on the principle of solidarity. If the vast majority of our parish cannot participate in our collective sacramental life, then it seems good that the rest of us should abstain as well.

*(continued, see RECTOR’S DESK, page 2)*

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# Apart, But Celebrating Together (continued from pg. 1)

Now it will not be only some of us, but in fact all of us, who know what the psalmists meant when they wrote, *“my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God”* (84:2) or again *“as the deer panteth for the water, so my soul longeth after Thee”* (42:1) or again *“behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity”* (133:1). Now it is not some of us who will be deprived, but rather all of us. Now it will not be some of us who are unable to walk beneath the winding sheet or to process around the church at midnight with candles in our hands and hearts aflame: it will be all. Now it is not some of us who will not receive Holy Communion at the liturgies of Great and Holy Thursday, Saturday, and Pascha: it will be all.

So we, then, will be united in suffering and in longing. And it is our hope that we will emerge from this period of time with a new hunger for the divine services and a new thirst for the Christ's holy teachings. One thing that I think we can say from this is that it will be a long time before any of us is again tempted to take the services of the Church for granted. Let us remember and give thanks to God for the blessings and opportunities we uniquely have in our local situation.

In my short time in Alaska, I was once tasked with flying out to the priestless “house church” in Quinhagak, a brotherhood of around 30 souls. It had been over a year since a priest had come to them when I arrived. Can you imagine the hunger for the holy mysteries that such people must feel? All of them confessed; all communed. Many of them brought their non-Orthodox neighbors to the services. We served services and blessed homes constantly in our short stay. And these are not alone in the history of the world. There are many Orthodox Christians who have to travel for hours to attend services. And it has occurred to me from the study of history, that there have even been some Orthodox Christians in remote parts of the

world who were baptized as infants by their parents and have lived whole lives never being able to be chrismated, let alone to receive the holy gifts! So let us, brothers and sisters, remember how blessed we are and remember what great responsibilities we have on account of this: to God, to the world, and to each other.

There will be many ways we will observe Holy Week together as a community. Through technology, we will hear the readings of Holy Week, culminating with the 12 Passion Gospels on Thursday night and of the Old Testament prophecies on Holy Saturday morning. For information on how to participate, call (814) 231-2855; no computer is needed. And since the Saturday Open Houses are for all the faithful, we will continue this practice. At the Open House on Lazarus Saturday, we will distribute blessed palms to all who want them; on Holy Saturday we will bless your Paschal baskets.

I have asked that all parishioners be commemorated before the Lamb at the Paschal Liturgy at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. Before your home altars, please remember each other as well—a continually-updated prayer list can be found at [holytrinity-oca.org/commemorations](http://holytrinity-oca.org/commemorations). To add names to either list, email [prayers@holytrinity-oca.org](mailto:prayers@holytrinity-oca.org) or contact the Parish Office. May God remember us, bring us salvation, preserve us from this present calamity, and lead us back together in peace, health and concord.

I have been deeply impressed with the spiritual maturity of all the faithful who have contacted me expressing a desire that the services go on, even if they are themselves forbidden to enter or to partake. The liturgies, dear and beloved, will go on, not just in cloistered monasteries, but in Heaven, where there is an everlasting Pascha under the gentle light of the never-setting Sun. Our in-person services are cancelled. Our building is closed. But Christ is still risen, glory be to God! ■

— Fr. Ignatius

## Join Us for Virtual Coffee Hour!

The Choir was the first ministry to take advantage of technology to stay connected through Friday afternoon (2 p.m.) rehearsals once the shutdown began. This month, three Sunday School classes will meet with Fr. Ignatius (grades 3-5, Wed. Apr. 8 at 4 p.m.; 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>, Tue. Apr. 7 at 7 p.m.; 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, Wed. Apr. 8 at 7 p.m.) And, now, on Palm Sunday, April 12, the entire parish will have the opportunity to fellowship with one another! After you pray the Festal Typika (find it at [holytrinity-oca.org](http://holytrinity-oca.org)), grab a bagel and/or coffee and visit [join.freeconferencecall.com/holytrinity-oca](http://join.freeconferencecall.com/holytrinity-oca) (to see video) or call (508) 924-5540 (audio only). We start at 11 a.m.

## Housing Transitions Update

Although Centre House—the State College homeless shelter where parish volunteers serve a monthly meal—is closed, there are still eight people in eight separate locations (for “social distancing” reasons) for whom Housing Transitions is providing basic needs and case management. The residents remain thrilled to have a home cooked meal, or food that is ready to be assembled. If you can volunteer, please contact Samar Maalouf at [homesless@holytrinity-oca.org](mailto:homesless@holytrinity-oca.org) or call (814) 231-2855. She can help you plan a meal that can be divvied up and arrange a time for the staff to receive it and deliver it to the residents. Volunteers are needed for June and July.

## April Bookstore Feature: eBooks

Although the physical Bookstore is closed, its inventory will be posted this month at [holytrinity-oca.org](http://holytrinity-oca.org) where one can purchase items and opt for free local delivery (this already applies to the Parish Library, peruse it now at the above URL). In the meantime, if you have a specific request, email [bookstore@holytrinity-oca.org](mailto:bookstore@holytrinity-oca.org) or refer to the extensive list of eBooks and downloadable music at Ancient Faith—[store.ancientfaith.com/ebooks](http://store.ancientfaith.com/ebooks).

## Open Houses to Continue

Until reopening (hopefully on May 1, please pray), both churches will continue Saturday “open houses” for personal prayer and meditation. State College's posted hours are 1 to 4 p.m.; Beavertown's are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Please adhere to the social distancing practices in place, follow posted directives, and enter at your own risk.

## The Work of the Church

*(continued from pg. 1)*

The novel coronavirus did not cancel Lent or postpone Pascha, nor is it preventing parishioners to keep ministering to one another. As worship moved exclusively to home altars and icon corners, several ministires adapted to serve those in the parish family and beyond. Members of the Choir began assembling Reader's Sunday and Holy Week services to be posted on the parish website. A list of all the parish's departed and living (including those serving in the armed forces and in healthcare) was assembled and made available for the faithful. *Matthew 25* and Dn. Mark Oleynik re-scheduled the Lion's Pantry Lenten Drive to the Sundays of October (*Soup*-er Sunday will now take place on Sunday, October 25), donated supplies that had already come in to the State College Food Bank, and continued to accept donations to help the least among us. Moreover a “Virtual Greeters” ministry was mobilized to check in on the parish's seniors and deliver groceries to their doorsteps; the Orthodox Christian Fellowship at Penn State (OCF) and Choir moved to online meetings (Thursdays at 9 p.m. and Fridays at 2 p.m., respectively); and the Parish Council and clergy discussed contingency plans for the present and re-affirmed the parish's still bright and growing future.

As Melody Thompson reminded the now-remote greeters team, “‘virtual’ is thought to mean ‘not quite’ or ‘not the real thing.’ However, its actual meaning is some-thing ‘having the same virtues, essence, or effect,’ even if its physical manifestation is not the same. So we as God's people continue to have the same goal of facilitating connections to the Church.” She quoted St. Porphyrios: “For the people of God there is no such thing as distance, even if they be thousands of miles apart... When Christ unites us, distances don't exist.”

Likewise, Frs. Ignatius and David remain available to all for pastoral support and guidance, and the Parish Office remains open at (814) 231-2855 to facilitate connections, and provide financial or logistical assistance. Please continue to support the parish through your prayers and stewardship as you are able. ■

■ SUNDAY SCHOOL SCOOP

# How to Pray at Home

by Mka. Sasha Safchuk

During my recent cancer treatment, when my white blood cell count was particularly compromised, I stayed home from Vespers and the Liturgy and participated through the livestream.

Although we are all impacted by concerns about COVID-19, some populations seem to be more vulnerable than others. [Even after the stay-at-home mandates are lifted], many people may decide that it is safer to stay home from church services. The hope is that a decline in social contact and gatherings will diminish the number of cases of the virus. This is quite sensible and those with symptoms or concerns and those who are avoiding other types of social contact in order to feel safer, should certainly remain home.

Please, however, be mindful of what you do with that time. Keep in mind that the Liturgy is the work of the people of God. It is the whole Church that performs the *leiturgia*, yet in this common action everyone has [his or her] own particular function... And there can be no liturgy without the *laos*, the people, the congregation: for it is the prayers and oblations of the people that the priest offers to God, and it is in order to transform the congregation into the Body of Christ that he has received the grace of Christ’s priesthood. (Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life*, pg. 38)

[When ecclesiastical or governmental prohibition] prevents the celebration of [services you may opt] to participate in the services via the livestream. But it’s not as easy as it seems.

Set aside that time. Make the sign of the cross. Bow your head. Be present. Resist the temptation to have a cup of coffee or do a quick check on your email. Except for the time I was in that MRI machine, I **always** have difficulty focusing on prayer, corporate or private. Being home alone with my computer made it even harder.

## Helpful Resources

*There are several ways for you to offer prayers at home. Simply log into **holytrinity-oca.org** and click on the banner at the top to be automatically directed to a full list of Reader Services you can pray yourself as well as a complete list of livestreaming churches.*

**HEAR ALL THE READINGS OF HOLY WEEK**  
*Even though there will be no services at either location until we can all be together, Fr. Ignatius and Fr. David will read all the prophecies, epistles, and gospels of Holy Week daily at 6 p.m. beginning Palm Sunday, April 12 through Holy Friday evening (Holy Saturday’s readings are at 9 a.m.). To join by phone, call (508) 924-5540; to join by video, visit **join.freeconferencecall.com/holytrinity-oca**.*

And there is the temptation to skip it all together. Sometimes the connection is glitchy. Sometimes the sound cuts out. We can certainly reason that it is just easier to read the Sunday paper and catch up on the COVID-19 numbers or throw in a load of laundry. And certainly no one would blame us. And who would know? *Who* indeed!

If you cannot participate in the livestream, use the time for prayer and spiritual reading. Luckily, the same internet that gives us up-to-the-minute virus updates and advice on boosting our immune system, also has the daily scripture readings, lives of saints (some who lived during terrible widespread illness) and a sheaf of excellent articles about Lent and Pascha. [Download the Sunday Typika from *holytrinity-oca.org*.] Read the Propers for the day. Pray for those suffering, those who will suffer, those providing care for the suffering and those whose death has come via COVID-19. This is our work as the people of God.

When this has passed let us come together in love and thanksgiving, honoring the God who has given us life and drawing near in faith and love. ■

■ NEWS & NOTES

## Help for Families Facing School Closures this Month

NAPLES, ID. [*via chrconline.com*] — The Classical Learning Resource Center, founded by Orthodox Christians (John and Anne Van Fossen) and with a largely Orthodox teaching staff, has been offering online classes for over 10 years. Several CLRC instructors have developed Spring 2020 Short Courses specifically designed to help families affected by school closures. These are all live interactive classes covering the subjects of grammar, mathematics, languages, art, architecture, and classical literature, which will be limited to about 15 students. Registration for these classes is open now. Visit the above website for more information.

## Orthodox Church in America Marks Fiftieth Anniversary

SYOSSET, NY. [*via oca.org*] — March 31 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Agreement on the Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America (also called the “Metropolia”). The agreement was the result of a number of meetings between senior bishops and clergy of the two churches which began in the early 1960s. Learn more about the vision and creation of the Orthodox Church in America at *oca.org*.

## Kenyan Mission Priest Could Use Our Help Once Again

Mission Priest Fr. Eliakim Kulali who we have been assisting has a daughter Larissa who was admitted to the hospital last month: She has an inadequate white blood cell count, and Fr. Kulali is \$155 short on her medical bill. Our Dean, Fr. Mark Meholick, is asking us for just \$5 or \$10 to help. Funds raised above this amount will be an extra blessing for Fr. Kulali as Kenyans are also struggling with COVID-19. (Non-essential businesses are shuttered there too, so it is difficult to buy food.) To give, memo a small portion of your tithe for “Fr. Kulali” and we’ll pass it along.

■ IN MEMORIAM

## Guram Abashidze (+2020)

On Saturday, March 21, our parish family lost Guram Abashidze, a loving son, brother, and friend. The son of George and Ia Abashidze, and brother of Anna and Sophia, Guram was born on December 10, 1990 in Tbilisi, Georgia. He moved to the United States when he was 3.



Although he was diagnosed with Stage IV thyroid cancer when he was only 7 years old and fought his battle with cancer for 22 years, Guram was a very happy and energetic child, and grew to be a caring and kind young man. He graduated Penn State University in 2014. Although he was battling cancer for most of his life, he would never show it because he kept a smile on his face and spread positivity at all times. He always knew how to make everyone laugh and light up the room. Guram never failed to live his life to fullest and made everyone enjoy his presence in their lives.

Friends visited Guram in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio on Tuesday, March 24 and he was laid to rest at the Sacred Monastery of St. Nina in Frederick County, Maryland on Thursday the 26<sup>th</sup>. Abbess Aemiliane, and the nuns under her care, warmly welcomed Guram into their community and invited all members of his parish family to visit once the threat of COVID-19 has passed. **May Guram’s memory be eternal! ■**

## For the Record

**ELECTION**  
➤ *The 2020-21 officers of the Orthodox Christian Fellowship at Penn State are **Hannah Oleynik** (President), **Kira Godshall** (Vice President), **Katerina Hernandez** (Secretary), **Megan Bokach** (Treasurer), and **Will Baumgardner** (Service Chair). **Many years!***

# Words of Consolation for the Pandemic

by Archimandrite Zachariah Zacharou

Many people are in panic because of the threat of the Coronavirus epidemic that spread in the whole world. I think, however, that this should not happen, for whatever God does with us, He does it out of love. The God of Christians is a good God, a God of mercy and lovingkindness, “Who loveth mankind.” God created us out of His goodness in order to share His life and even His glory with us. When we fell into sin, He allowed death to enter our life again out of goodness, so that we may not become immortal in our wickedness, but to seek for a way of salvation. Although we have fallen, God has never stopped to provide for us, not only material goods in order to sustain our race, but He also sent prophets and righteous, preparing His way so that He might come and solve our tragedy, and bring eternal salvation through the Cross and Resurrection of His inconceivable love. He came and took upon Himself the curse of sin, and He showed His love to the end: “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (*John 13:1*).

All the things that God did when He created us, when He provided goods in order to sustain the world, when He prepared His way for Him to come on earth, when He came Himself in person and wrought our salvation in such an awesome way, all these things He did out of goodness. His goodness is boundless. He saves us and is so longsuffering towards us, waiting until we “come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Tim. 2:4*) and bring true repentance, so that we may be with Him for all eternity. Thus, at every stage of His relationship with man, our God shows only His goodness and mercy, “which is better than life” (*Ps. 63:3*); goodness is His Nature and He does all things for the benefit and salvation of man.

Consequently, when He shall come again to judge the world, will a different God judge it? Will it not be the

same good God, the God of mercy and lovingkindness, Who loves mankind? Let us be certain that we shall not appear before any other God than Him Who created us and saved us. And so, it is again with the same mercy and love that He will judge us. For this reason, we should neither panic nor waver, for it will be the same God that will receive us in the other life and will judge us with the same kindness and compassion. Some fear that the hour of their end has come. This plague of Coronavirus has also a positive aspect, because we have a few weeks from the moment it will assail us until our end. Therefore, we can dedicate this time to prepare ourselves for our meeting with God, so that our departure may not occur unexpectedly and without preparation, but after we have run through our whole life each time we stand in prayer before God, at times with thanksgiving unto the end for all the things God has done for us and at other times with repentance, seeking the forgiveness of our transgressions. Nothing can harm us with such a God, Who allows all things out of His goodness. We must simply keep thanksgiving unto the end [and repent] of our sins...

We must see the goodness of God in all the things that are happening now. The Holy Fathers did see His lovingkindness. A similar epidemic occurred in the 4<sup>th</sup> century in the Egyptian desert, which harvested more than a third of the monks, and the Fathers were saying with great inspiration that, “God is harvesting souls of saints for His Kingdom,” and they did not waver. The Lord Himself speaks in the Gospel about the last days, about the trials and afflictions which the world will go through before His Second Coming. However, we discern neither morbid sadness nor despair in His words. The Lord Who prayed in the garden of Gethsemane with a sweat of blood for the salvation of the whole world, says that when we see the terrible things that precede His Second Coming, we should lift up our heads with inspiration, for our redemption draws nigh (*cf. Luke 21:28*)...

Thus, there is no room for morbid dismay. Neither should we resist the measures that the government is taking in order to diminish the spreading of the afflictions we see in the lives of so many people. It is wrong to go against the authorities. We should do whatever the Government says, because they are not asking for us to deny our faith, they are only asking us to take a few measures for the common welfare of all people, so that this trial may pass, and this is not at all unreasonable. Some people take it too confessionally, they raise flags and play the martyrs and the confessors. For us there is no doubt: we shall show pure submission to the orders of the Government. It is unfair to disobey the Government since, when we fall ill, it is to their hospitals that we run and they are the ones who under-take all the expenses and our care. Why not listen to them?

If we do not obey our governors who are not asking much, how will we obey God, Who gives us a divine law, which is far more sublime than any human law? If we keep the law of God we are above human laws, as the apologists of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century said during the Roman Empire which was persecuting the Christians...

If they ask us to stop our Church services, let us simply surrender and bless the Providence of God. Besides, this reminds us of an old tradition that the Fathers had in Palestine: in Great Lent, on the Sunday of Cheese-fare, after the mutual forgiveness, they would go out in the desert for forty days without Liturgy; they would only continue in fasting and prayer so as to prepare and return on Palm Sunday to celebrate in a godly way the Passion and the Resurrection of the Lord. And so, our present circumstances force us to live again that which existed of old in the bosom of the Church. That is to say, they force us to live a more *hesychastic* life, with more prayer, which will however make up for the lack of the Divine Liturgy and will prepare us to celebrate with greater desire and inspiration the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Thus, we will turn this plague into a triumph of hesychasm. In any case, whatever God allows in our life is out of His goodness for the well-being of man, for He never wants His creature to be harmed in any way.

Certainly, if we will be deprived of the Divine Liturgy for a longer period of time, we can endure it... [Prayer] leads us into His Presence. This Presence of Christ which is purifying, cleanses us from our transgressions and sins, it renews and illumines our heart so that the image of God our Savior Christ may be formed therein. If we shall not have Easter in the Church, let us remember that every contact with Christ is Easter. We receive grace in the Divine Liturgy because the Lord Jesus is present in it, He performs the sacrament and He is the One imparted to the faithful. However, when we invoke His Name, we enter the same Presence of Christ and receive the same grace. Therefore, if we are deprived of the Liturgy, we always have His Name, we are not deprived of the Lord. Moreover, we also have His word, especially His Gospel. If His word dwells continually in our heart, if we study it and pray it, if it becomes our language with which we speak to God as He spoke to us, then we shall have again the grace of the Lord for His words are words of eternal life...

Furthermore, each time we show kindness to our brethren the Lord is well-pleased... We can have the grace of the Lord through fasting, almsgiving and every good deed... All the things we do for God is a Liturgy, for they minister unto our salvation. The Liturgy is the great event of the life of the Church, wherein the faithful have the possibility to exchange their little life with the boundless life of God. However, the power of this event [comes from our preparation], through all the things we have mentioned, through prayer, good deeds, fasting, love for neighbor, repentance.

Therefore, my dear brethren, it is not necessary to make heroic confessions against the Government for the prophylactic measures that it takes for the good of all people. Neither should we despair, but only wisely machinate ways so as not to lose our living communication with the Person of Christ. Nothing can harm us, we must simply be patient for a certain period of time and God will see our patience, take away every obstacle, every temptation and we shall again see the dawn of joyful days, and we shall celebrate our common hope and love that we have in Christ Jesus. ■