

Report of the Chancellor
Mitred Archbishop Joseph Lickwar
to the Assembly of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey
November 5, 2020

Christ is in our midst! He is and shall be!

The year 2020 will be remembered as the year of the Pandemic (COVID-19), which directly affected the health of thousands of Americans and indirectly millions of Americans' financial stability as well as thousands of institutions and businesses. There was no part of life that was not altered, damaged, destroyed and some aspects are beyond restoration.

With beginning of the Pandemic in March our Archbishop along with the other members of the Holy Synod met continuously to issue directives to govern our faithful and Parish Councils.

Families were affected as individuals lost their jobs. Grade and high school students and college students were confined to home and subject to virtual learning. Social ties between family members, students and friends were greatly altered and our churches were either closed or remained opened under certain conditions.

The vulnerable and the elderly, who had existing health issues, were exempt from services. The option was given to clergy and faithful, with the blessing of their bishop to stay home if they had health concerns. There were long term concerns of the dangers of depression, alcoholism, violence, isolation and suicide.

Across America the United States Government imposed a mandatory system of phases for the reopening of religious institutions and businesses. Churches had to comply with the guidelines for reopening and submit petition to His Eminence for permission to open. The level of contributions to our parishes dropped and fundraising income for our parishes was drastically affected. There was great concern about clergy salaries and benefits being met. The federal government created the Personal Payroll Program and issued funds to Americans and to our Diocese.

Limits were set regarding the amount of persons who could attend services. A person desiring the Sacrament of Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, and Marriage was subject to the blessing of our Archbishop. A uniform method of the distribution of Communion was adjusted to alleviate the fear of the spread of the disease.

A parish had to develop and maintain a schedule for inviting parishioners for services. The cleaning and disinfecting of the temple had to be completed before and after every service; social time after services and fund raising was not permitted; the wearing of masks and distancing was required; icons and cross veneration and the kissing of the priest's hand was not permitted. As the Pandemic began in March our churches were empty for Great Lent and Pascha. The simple tasks became complicated to do, such as, the distribution of willows, holy water, the Paschal Artos and the distribution of the Antidoron were a challenge and subject to personal

Report of the Chancellor
Mitred Archpriest Joseph Lickwar
to the Assembly of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey
November 5, 2020

handling of items. These involved an assembly or groups, which were forbidden. The meetings of the Diocesan Council, the Deaneries, other committees and the meetings of Parishes were limited and conducted via Zoom or other technology.

Visitation by a priest or family to a nursing home or hospital was not permitted by those institutions. The deceased could not be brought to church or a funeral home; the family of the deceased was met at the cemetery for a service. There were fatalities even among funeral home staff.

The educational events and programs sponsored by the diocese and parishes came to a halt. However, Saint Andrew's Camp opened for the summer months as a family event with a parent present along with their child.

Many parishioners who worked as health care workers underwent weeks of working in hospitals or nursing homes with their own lives at risk of infection.

The Federal Government introduced a program, *Opening up America Again* consisting of Phases for the reopening of religious institutions. Our Archbishop in conjunction with the Holy Synod implemented these guidelines and issued revisions. Financial support of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey, the parish churches and our faithful came in the form of the Paycheck Protection Plan established by the Federal Government.

If COVID-19 returns, there is concern it will reverse what normality has been reestablished and the faithful will face personal challenges once again.

We are grateful to His Eminence and the clergy of our churches, who diligently strived to overcome the limitations that came with adjusting to this crisis. Though many have remained safe during this time, we should not be over confident. We need to follow the directives of our Archbishop and those of the Federal and State Governments.