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“WE GO FEARLESSLY INTO THE MAW OF DEATH”: THE INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC OF 1918 IN AMERICAN ORTHODOX RUS’

ARAM G. SARKISIAN

ABSTRACT: The influenza epidemic of 1918 afflicted millions of people in the United States, among them Orthodox Christians. These included thousands of Carpatho-Rusyn believers who predominantly comprised what leaders of the Russian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America called American Orthodox Rus’. For these working-class Orthodox Christians, influenza laid bare the critical vulnerabilities and insecurities of immigrant life. During the epidemic, believers turned to their church for spiritual comfort, and to religious newspapers for practical health advice. They also relied upon parachurch institutions like mutual-aid societies for fraternity and material support. Taken together, these aspects portray the influenza epidemic as an interwoven medical, spiritual, and social crisis that threatened lives, strained community resources, and disrupted the complex religious worlds of American Orthodox Rus’. Contrasted against the COVID-19 pandemic a century later, the long-overlooked influenza epidemic illustrates the changing role of the Orthodox Church in believers’ social and material lives in North America.

1.

On Sunday, September 29, 1918, Father Alexander Lupinovich celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Annunciation Russian Orthodox Church in Maynard, Massachusetts. That afternoon, he dined with friends in the parish rectory, telling jokes and bouncing his young daughter on his knee. After a short rest, he left the rectory to attend a meeting of the Annunciation Brotherhood, a local chapter of the Russian Orthodox Catholic Mutual Aid Society. When he returned home, Lupinovich complained to his wife of a sore throat and runny nose. Natalia Lupinovich rubbed her husband’s body with camphor oil, then sent him to bed with a mug of tea and a warm blanket.

During the night, Fr. Alexander developed a severe fever. A doctor was summoned, who quickly diagnosed the sickness as influenza. For days, Lupinovich floated in and out of consciousness, enduring delirium, vomiting, and a temperature that hovered above 104 degrees. On Thursday, he was alert enough to receive Holy Communion and Holy Unction. By Saturday, the sixth day of his illness, there were few signs of life. Late that dark evening, as a thunderstorm rolled in from the west and flashes of lightning lit the sky, Fr. Alexander Lupinovich died. He was 28 years old.¹

Between 1918 and 1920, a global influenza epidemic struck an estimated 500 million people, one-third of the world's population. At least 50 million people died. One-quarter of the U.S. population, an estimated 25 million people, were afflicted, of which 675,000 perished. The epidemic altered nearly every aspect of American life, especially between October and December 1918. State, county, and municipal health departments imposed restrictions on social gatherings, commerce, and even religious practice to slow the rate of infection. Cloth masks now became common, hospitals were overrun with patients, and cemeteries were burying the dead around the clock. The impact of the virus was widely felt, and in profoundly troubling ways. Its debilitating symptoms arrived swiftly. For too many, it brought a gruesome death. The historian Nancy Bristow observed that "for millions of Americans, both those who suffered from influenza and those who lost loved ones to the disease, the 1918 pandemic lived on in vivid memories and in lives indelibly marked by those experiences."²

Among those in the United States so "indelibly marked" were Orthodox Christians, including working-class believers who hailed from the agricultural borderlands of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Self-identifying as Russian, Rusyn, Carpatho-Russian, or Lemko, they were often (derisively) called "Hunkies." Many had converted to Orthodoxy from Greek Catholicism, and most retained familial or social ties to those communities.³ Struggling with the pangs of homesickness and distance from those they left behind, believers built their communities along the path of American industrialization. They toiled in the lowest-paying, dirtiest, most dangerous sectors of the industrial economy. Living in tenements, workers' camps, and boarding houses, their everyday experiences were determined by the indignities of the industrial city and factory town. Their church was a bulwark against such uncertainty and despair as much as it was a source of social support and spiritual uplift.

1. "Poslyednie dni zhizni o. Aleksandra Lupinovicha," *Svit*, November 14, 1918.

2. Nancy Bristow, *American Pandemic: The Lost Worlds of the 1918 Influenza Epidemic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

3. Paul Robert Magocsi, *With Their Backs to the Mountains: A History of Carpathian Rus' and Carpatho-Rusyns* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2015); Paul Robert Magocsi, *Our People: Carpatho-Rusyns and Their Descendants in North America* (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2005) James Jorgenson, "Father Alexis Toth and the Transition of the Greek Catholic Community in Minneapolis to the Russian Orthodox Church," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 32, No. 2 (1988): 119–37; John D. Goman, *Galician-Rusins on the Iron Range* (Minneapolis: Rohart Services Desktop Publishers, 1990); Keith Russin, "Father Alexis G. Toth and the Wilkes-Barre Litigations," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 16, No. 3 (1972): 128–49.

These believers encompassed what leaders of the Russian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America called American Orthodox Rus', a multifaceted missionary enterprise intended to mitigate these indignities while ensuring that believers were firmly planted in an idealized vision of Holy Orthodox Russia. By 1918, the archdiocese was divided into 31 geographic deaneries spanning 32 states and territories, and 6 Canadian provinces. More than 250 clergy served its over 300 houses of worship.⁴ There were men's and women's monastic communities; a seminary; evening and Sunday schools; reading rooms; musical ensembles and theater troupes; temperance societies; banks; immigrant homes; an orphanage; a vibrant religious press; and mutual aid, fraternal, and benevolence societies.⁵ The rise of Bolshevism in Russia brought significant disruptions to many, if not all, of these endeavors. Under the leadership of an unsteady temporary administrator, Bishop Alexander (Nemolovsky), the archdiocese was in significant debt and disagreements over its ecclesiastical leadership had become rife.⁶ As such, influenza struck at an inopportune moment when American Orthodox Rus' was less equipped to address the ramifications of a terrifying and invisible virus than it might have been only a few months earlier.

While it is difficult to determine how many believers across American Orthodox Rus' contracted influenza, it almost certainly numbered in the thousands: men and women, young and old. Hundreds died, though the actual number may have been much higher. Few if any communities were spared. Despite such wide reach within Orthodox communities, however, the epidemic experience was gradually forgotten. This was not uncommon. Within their own communities, like so many others, Orthodox Christians constructed what Bristow calls a "preferred narrative," minimizing historical memory of profound individual and communal losses that were deeply felt.⁷ What is more, Patricia Fanning observes, the epidemic "was felt most by those with least access to the authoritative written word: poor military conscripts, Native Americans, laborers, and immigrants."⁸ As such, stories of the influenza epidemic are rare in both church historiography and historical memory, and Orthodox communities do not appear in general histories of the epidemic.⁹

4. These statistics do not include the autonomous Syro-Arab, Albanian, and Serbian vicariates.

5. A complete directory of all parishes and church institutions can be found in "The Orthodox Diocese of North America and Canada," *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, January 1918, 4–10; and February 1918, 26–29.

6. Constance Tarasar, ed., *Orthodox America, 1794–1976*, (Syosset, NY: Orthodox Church in America Department of History and Archives, 1975), 177–79; Gregory Afonsky, *A History of the Orthodox Church in America, 1917–1934* (Kodiak, AK: St. Herman Theological Seminary Press, 1994), 25; Aram Sarkisian, "The Cross Between Hammer and Sickle: Russian Orthodox Christians in the United States, 1908–1928" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2019), 140–41.

7. Bristow, *American Pandemic*, 8.

8. Patricia J. Fanning, *Influenza and Inequality: One Town's Tragic Response to the Great Epidemic of 1918* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 128.

9. One notable exception is the recent interest in the life of Fr. Nicola Yanney, a Syrian priest who contracted influenza while visiting afflicted parishioners in Nebraska and who continued to visit them when he began to show symptoms himself. Yanney died from influenza on October 28, 1918. See the Saint Raphael Clergy Brotherhood, *Apostle to the Plains: The Life of Father Nicola Yanney* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2019), 243–52.

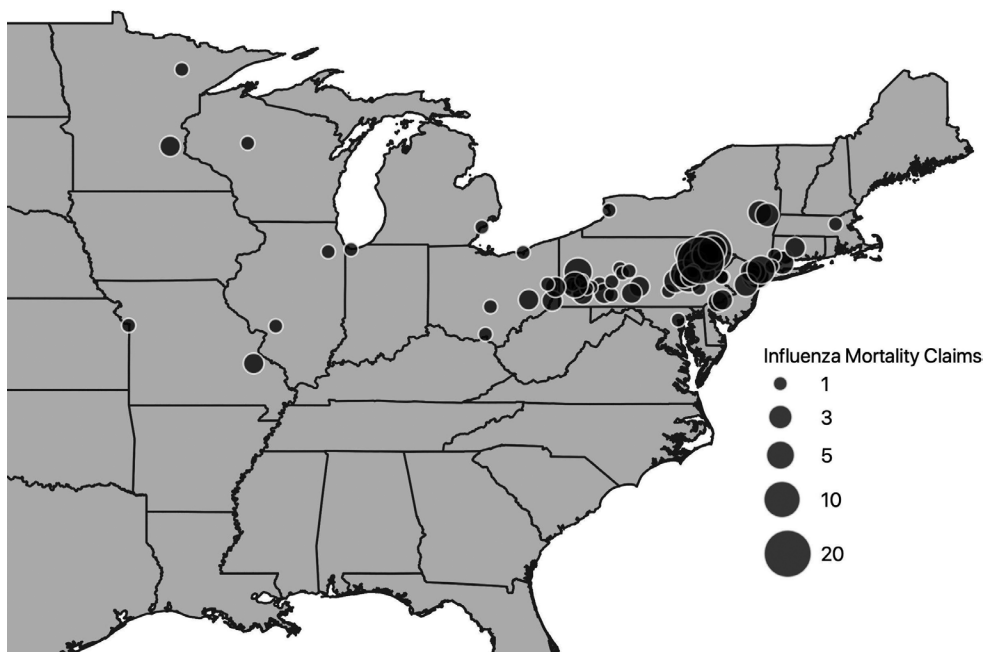


Figure 1. Influenza-related mortality claims, plotted by chapter and weighted for total claims, October-December 1918 (Map by the author).

Even so, a significant historical record speaks to how American Orthodox Rus' experienced the epidemic. Church newspapers wrote extensively about influenza, providing a glimpse into how church leaders addressed its impact. To excavate how it affected the archdiocese's mostly Carpatho-Rusyn believers, I draw on mortality statistics compiled and published by the Russian Orthodox Catholic Mutual Aid Society (*Russkoe Pravoslavnoe Kafolicheskoe Obshchestvo Vzaimopomoshchi*, or ROCMAS). One of several fraternal and benevolence societies operating within American Orthodox Rus' at the time, ROCMAS included men and women, and was unique in that it had administrative ties to the Russian Archdiocese, and it permitted the clergy to become members.¹⁰ In the pages of its newspaper, *Svit* (*The Light*), the society listed the names, ages, and chapter affiliations of over 200 fatal influenza cases in more than 100 communities during the epidemic (see fig. 1).

Viewed through these sources, the influenza epidemic helps us to understand American Orthodox Rus' as a religious world built by and for working-class Orthodox people. This world encompassed the Russian Archdiocese, as well as parachurch institutions like ROCMAS. In this way, I draw upon the framework of lived religion, outlined by scholars of American religions like Robert Orsi and David Hall, a framework applied to Russian Orthodoxy by Heather Coleman, Vera Shevzov, and

10. Tarasar, *Orthodox America*, 113–18.

others.¹¹ Lived religion, Orsi explains, places "religious practices and imagination in ongoing, dynamic relation with the realities and structures of everyday life in particular times and places."¹² More recently, scholars of American religion have re-focused this interpretive lens within the class analysis of labor studies. This framing centralizes the co-constitutive roles of work and class in the molding of lived religious practice and experience, as well as the associated role of religion as a mitigating factor against everyday struggles. In twentieth-century industrial America, Matthew Pehl argues, religion "helped shape what it meant to *be* working-class: the way a person performed religion, and the religious communities that one joined, defined—for oneself and others—so much else about that person's social and economic status."¹³ For working-class believers, the determinative factors of their material lives—wages, workplace conditions, standards of living, access to healthcare, and relationships with employers, supervisors, and coworkers—all necessitated the elements of American Orthodox Rus' meant to alleviate the indignities, tragedies, and insecurities of life in the industrial United States.¹⁴

Utilizing these frameworks, this article explores two complementary narratives that illustrate how the influenza epidemic brought tragic and lasting impacts upon Orthodox believers, families, communities, and religious institutions across American Orthodox Rus'. First, I explore how the epidemic affected the spiritual and liturgical life of the unsteady, postrevolutionary Russian Archdiocese as priests and lay believers alike began to fall ill and die, and how the church adapted its activities to public health orders intended to slow the virus. I then shift to discussing how the epidemic adversely affected the ability of parachurch institutions to offer financial security and social support for Orthodox workers and families, focusing specifically on ROCMAS. The

11. Heather Coleman has called for the use of lived religion to "write the Russian religious experience into mainstream histories of religion in Europe and of Christianity in the modern age." See Heather J. Coleman, "Studying Russian Religion Since the Collapse of Communism," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 25, no. 2 (2014): 316. See Vera Shevzov, "Letting the People into Church: Reflections on Orthodoxy and Community in Late Imperial Russia," in *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice Under the Tsars*, ed. Valerie Kivelson and Robert H. Greene (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 69. Here Shevzov contrasts the study of lived religion against the Russian historiography of "everyday Orthodoxy" (*bytovoe pravoslavie*). See also Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

12. Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950*, 2d ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), xiii. For a range of theoretical observations on the category of lived religion, see David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

13. Matthew Pehl, *The Making of Working-Class Religion* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 210.

14. Richard Callahan, *Work and Faith in the Kentucky Coal Fields: Subject to Dust* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 6. See also John Hayes, *Hard, Hard Religion: Interracial Faith in the Poor South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Jared Roll, *Spirit of Rebellion: Labor and Religion in the New Cotton South* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Heath W. Carter, *Union Made: Working People and the Rise of Social Christianity in Chicago* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

disproportionate impact of the influenza epidemic on working-age adults amplified the importance of the society's fraternal bonds, even as the epidemic also strained financial resources and even threatened the organization's very survival. Taken together, these narratives vividly show that the influenza epidemic was a deeply interwoven medical, spiritual, and social crisis that altered the social and religious worlds of believers across American Orthodox Rus'—clergy and laypeople, women and men, young and old (though mostly young)—to a significant yet largely forgotten degree.

2.

The morning after Fr. Alexander Lupinovich died, two priests traveled 20 miles from Boston to Maynard. Singing the Trisagion and chanting psalms, Frs. Jacob Gregorieff and John Kositsky cleaned and anointed Lupinovich's body, then dressed him in a black *riassa*. His casket was arranged for viewing in the rectory dining room. For hours, Natalia Lupinovich stood next to her husband's body as grieving parishioners filled their home. One of them was a friend who had lunched with Lupinovich mere hours before he fell ill, attended to the family's needs throughout the week, and was present at the priest's deathbed. Their account of the funeral visitation described a scene they felt almost too difficult to bear. "On the very same table at which we had so recently had fun," they wrote, "in a poor, cheap coffin (for on account of the epidemic and frequent deaths, it was impossible to obtain a decent casket), lay our dear father" (see fig. 2).

The time came for the priest's casket to be taken to the church for a memorial service, after which he would be taken to the Monastery of St. Tikhon in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, for his funeral and interment. Outside the rectory, members of the parish brotherhood and the church choir assembled in formation behind a processional cross and icon banners. Singing the hymn from the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, "A Helper and a Protector," grieving parishioners carried candles as they bore the casket to the church. "This unusual spectacle in an American city attracted quite a crowd of people, which the large church could not sufficiently contain," the friend wrote. During the service, "the singing mingled with *matushka's* desperate cries . . . the entire temple was filled with sheer, indescribable sobbing."¹⁵ This significant display of public grief was all the more notable, if not alarming, for as another observer reported, "At that time in Maynard, Massachusetts, it seemed there was not a single house where there were not influenza patients."¹⁶

Throughout the epidemic, most especially in the autumn of 1918, American Orthodox Rus' trod a thin line between the church's aspirations to be a spiritual hospital—a "helper and protector" of the sick and suffering—and the need to adapt to public health measures that addressed the temporal realities of a fearsome virus

15. "Poslyednie dni zhizni o. Aleksandra Lupinovicha," *Svit*, November 14, 1918.

16. "Pamiati O. A. Lupinovicha," *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, October-November-December 1918, 125.

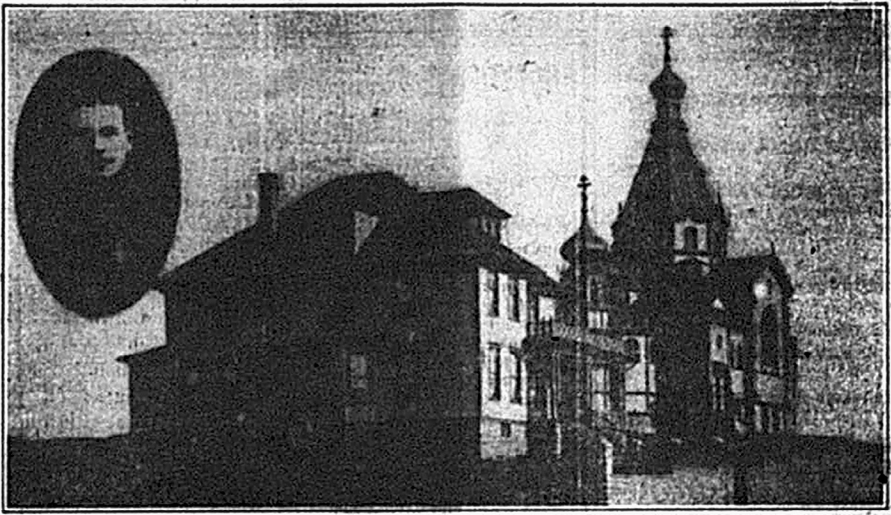


Figure 2. Photo, Fr. Alexander Lupinovich and parish complex in Maynard, Massachusetts (*Svit*, October 10, 1918).

medical science struggled to explain, much less cure. Scientists, medical experts, and historians of medicine have long been perplexed by the unusually catastrophic global impact of the so-called "Spanish flu." A strain of the H1N1 virus, the 1918 influenza virus was unique for its unusual morbidity and mortality distributions. Viral epidemics typically follow U-shaped curves, indicating greater vulnerability among children and the elderly, and a lower risk for people of working age. In 1918, however, the curve formed a peculiar W-shape, with heightened mortality for those between 20 and 40—the dominant demographic of American Orthodox Rus'. As the immunologist Anthony Fauci and the epidemiologist David Morens described it, there have been many hypotheses, but this anomaly remains "perhaps the most important unsolved mystery of the pandemic."¹⁷

Such lingering questions aside, scientists and historians alike link the epidemic's rapid spread with environmental factors such as working conditions, social habits, living environments, and healthcare access in communities like those of American Orthodox Rus'.¹⁸ Work-related illnesses were common, especially tuberculosis and

17. David M. Morens and Anthony S. Fauci, "The 1918 Influenza Pandemic: Insights for the 21st Century," *Journal of Infectious Diseases* 195 (April 1, 2007): 1022; Alfred W. Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17–36.

18. Julia F. Irwin, "An Epidemic without Enmity: Explaining the Missing Ethnic Tensions in New Haven's 1918 Influenza Epidemic," *Urban History Review* 36 (Spring 2008): 5–17; Kyra H. Grantz et al., "Disparities in Influenza Mortality and Transmission Related to Sociodemographic Factors within Chicago in the Pandemic of 1918," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113 (2016): 13839–44; G. Dennis Shanks and John F. Brundage, "Variable Mortality during the 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Chicago," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 114 (2017): E3586–7.

other respiratory ailments, as was physical debilitation from overwork. Immigrant laborers often suffered from poor nutrition, pointing to their weight loss as a manifestation of their struggles in America. Just as alarming were their living conditions. Investigators for the congressional Dillingham Commission visited areas where Orthodox workers lived, publishing their findings in a 41-volume report in 1911. They found smoky neighborhoods caked with dust and soot, their streets filled with wastewater and trash. They observed substandard (often company-owned) housing without plumbing or electricity, in which workers shared beds with strangers and slept in shifts. In the coal regions of Pennsylvania, the most heavily concentrated Orthodox region in the United States, investigators reported that mining company officials felt that “the existing conditions result from the fact that the foreigner is too dirty for the town to be other than what it is, but whether this is true or not, it seems that very little effort is made to improve the living conditions.”¹⁹

Though less quantifiable in objective terms, religious practices conducive to the transmission of a viral illness might also have played a factor in the spread of influenza within American Orthodox Rus'. At church, workers and their families stood in close proximity to others, venerated the same icons and crosses, embraced one another, used the same *zapivka* cups, and successively kissed clergymen's hands in blessing. Those who approached the chalice received the eucharist from a common spoon. Taken in total, the poor living conditions and environmental circumstances that the parishioners shared in common troubled clergy and other church workers, fears that were compounded during the pandemic. “There is not one who has lived to be sixty in my parish,” one priest lamented.²⁰

Despite the widespread health, safety, and environmental risks that Orthodox workers faced, they had only sporadic access to quality medical care. Some harbored wariness towards medical practitioners. What medical guidance workers received was of mixed quality in general and often came from Russian-language newspapers. Such newspapers—especially religious publications—were important sources of news and also information on practical matters like healthcare. These included the ROCMAS-published *Svit*, a weekly paper intended for a general, working-class readership that regularly published advertisements for patent medicines and the services of medical quacks (see fig. 3). A Chicago doctor observed that readers “look upon everything printed in the newspaper as absolute truth. They do not understand even

19. Reports of the Immigration Commission, Vol. 6, Pt 1: Bituminous Coal Mining (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 323. Reports most pertinent to the most concentrated areas of American Orthodox Rus' can be found in volumes 6–9. General conditions of Russian and Slavic emigration can be found in volume 4. For general observations, see also Jerome Davis, *The Russian Immigrant* (New York: Macmillan, 1922) and Emily Greene Balch, *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens* (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1910). For the history of the Dillingham Commission, see Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem: The Dillingham Commission and its Legacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

20. Davis, *The Russian Immigrant*, 72.



Figure 3. Detail of advertisement for Dr. Mendelson, a "Russian doctor" who practiced in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania (*Svit*, September 26, 1918).

that an advertisement is written and paid for by the advertiser and innocently think it is the newspaper that praises these physicians because they are so good."²¹

Though *Svit* continued to print medical advertisements during the epidemic, it also drew on its authority to publish practical and scientifically sound guidance on caring for the sick and slowing viral transmission. Instructions published in mid-October warned readers to avoid crowds, limit excursions, and cover their coughs and sneezes. Such articles informed readers about the importance of handwashing and sterilizing eating utensils, implored them to isolate the sick in separate rooms, and to call a doctor on the third or fourth day of illness. Readers were also dissuaded against popular folk remedies like wearing a pouch of camphor around the neck and advised instead to use trusted medications that were more effective.²²

21. Michael M. Davis, *Immigrant Health and the Community* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1921), 146.

22. "U kogo shcho bolit?," *Svit*, October 17, 1918; "Leki. chasinoiu predokhraniaiushchii ot influchn-tsii," *Svit*, October 17, 1918.

The credibility *Svit* enjoyed with its readers was expressed most vividly in the testimonials ROCMAS members submitted to mourn those they had lost, as well as in letters they wrote to frame their experiences of the epidemic in divine and apocalyptic terms. Having read accounts in *Svit* of the influenza epidemic in Pennsylvania and New York, a parishioner from Minneapolis wrote to report that while their numbers were far lower, the epidemic was no less distressing. He pondered if the epidemic was “probably nothing more than God’s punishment for human sin (!?) . . .” In his estimation,

“Perhaps if all who live in America had dealt more piously, God would not have punished the whole country with such mass illness. We hope that if only we start praying to God more, He will have mercy upon us all and turn away from us His punishing right hand.”²³

Alongside such material, readers also read about the deaths of four priests, including Fr. Alexander Lupinovich. All had contracted influenza in the course of their duties ministering to the sick and dying.²⁴ Their duty to minister to the sick was considered a clerical imperative. During an epidemic, it was a mortal risk, and one which only compounded the already difficult expectations placed on their work. At the parish level, the clergy navigated complex relationships that were simultaneously pastoral, social, and material. They were expected to be mediators between their congregants and the unfamiliar world around them, to intervene in moments of trouble or danger, and to do so selflessly. And they served within an archdiocesan structure that by the time the influenza epidemic struck was struggling to financially support its missionary clergy.²⁵

While church leaders recognized the danger of ministering to influenza patients, they demanded that clergymen do so, even though they provided little or no guidance on how to do so safely. Priests obligingly rushed from bed to bed and house to house as their congregants fell ill. In ordinary circumstances, Fr. Constantin Buketoff was responsible for his parishioners in Hartford, Connecticut, and others in surrounding towns without churches. “I recall many anguished moments when Father was called for final rites within minutes to take the only train to get there,” his granddaughter later remembered. During the epidemic, she recollected that Buketoff “worked literally day and night at the grim task of giving Communion to all the dying and of keeping up with the overwhelming number of funerals. The pressure was such that burials in the cemetery went on into the night around the clock!”²⁶

23. “Iz minneapolis,” *Svit*, October 24, 1918.

24. The others were Frs. Maxim Bakunoff, Ioann Komar, and Daniel Yachmenev. See “Missiynaiia khronika,” *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, October–November–December 1918, 121–25.

25. This ideal was outlined, albeit in an earlier influenza epidemic, during a 1900 visit to Alaska by Bishop Tikhon (Bellavin). See Scott Kenworthy, “St. Tikhon Condemns Racism During Epidemic,” *Public Orthodoxy*, June 29, 2020, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2020/06/29/st-tikhon-condemns-racism>.

26. Ludmilla Buketoff Turkevich, “The Right Reverend Constantin Buketoff, A Biographical Sketch (on his 50th anniversary as a priest),” *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, July–August 1957, 125–26.

Especially vulnerable were missionary priests whose work required exhausting travel to reach distant, isolated believers. Fr. Maxim Bakunoff²⁷ contracted influenza from a parishioner in Whitman, West Virginia, an Appalachian coal town where he was organizing a mission parish. On the evening of October 23, one of Bakunoff's parishioners, Dimitrii Kovach, who lived eight miles from Whitman, woke from a dream in which he saw "that our dear *batiushka* had given [his] soul unto God." Rushing to Whitman, Kovach discovered Anna Bakunoff grieving beside her husband's body. Whitman was a remote and underserved community (the closest parish was in Moundsville, West Virginia, more than 200 miles away). With no other clergy to prepare Bakunoff for burial, his parishioners performed these duties themselves. They pooled funds to buy a casket, then cleaned and dressed Bakunoff's body in fine white vestments, a dreadful task, given the disfigurement influenza inflicted on its victims. Then they transported their priest almost 300 miles for burial in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, where he had served previously.²⁸ "Despite a ban by the authorities," one account said, "a sizable number of people gathered in the church, and even more were on the church porch."²⁹

In a graveside eulogy, Bishop Alexander (Nemolovsky) praised Bakunoff as a model missionary whose labors in Whitman yielded an unusually strong parish "in a very short time." Addressing Bakunoff himself, Alexander lamented that the priest "died early, yet glorious in death, having contracted a terrible illness from your own flock." For Alexander, this was proof positive of Bakunoff's missionary zeal, the natural conclusion to an especially challenging ministry. Bakunoff, his wife, and their three young children shared a single room and slept together on the floor. Alexander imagined the priest at the end of a long day, having "arrived secretly in the night, afraid as if you would be asked for bread you didn't have." Turning to Bakunoff's loved ones, Alexander's gaze found the children, the youngest only an infant. "Who will warm them?"³⁰

The young Bakunoff family's struggles speak to the demands routinely laid on clerical families and even more to how the epidemic exacerbated the difficult conditions and relationships that defined their lives. In parishes served by married clergy, clerical families were integral parts of the religious and social networks of parish life. Clerical wives and children were expected to be visible and exemplar parishioners, to silently endure financial and residential arrangements that left them wanting, and to accept the demands and responsibilities could keep their husbands and fathers occupied at all hours of the day. Priests in the Russian Archdiocese earned \$800 per

27. Bakunoff's name was sometimes spelled "Bakun," especially in church publications. His preferred spelling was Bakunoff.

28. "Iz vitman, v. v-a." *Svit*, November 7, 1918. For effects of influenza on the body, see Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic*, 6–9.

29. "Pogrebenie sviashchennika O.M. Bakuna." *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, October-November-December 1918, 122–23.

30. "Ryech' u groba v bozhe pochivshago Missionara, Sviashch. o. Maskima Bakuna, proiznesennaia Preosviashchennym Aleksandrom 13/26 oktiabria 1918 g. v Allegenskoii Tserkvi," *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, October-November-December 1918, 121–22.

year on average, or \$13,136 in 2020 dollars, only slightly more than a coal miner or factory worker,³¹ even though the clergy generally held higher levels of education and social standing than their congregants.

Demands on clergy and clerical families only increased during the epidemic. The hours of the day were not enough to minister to all of the afflicted. So many were dying that cemetery entrances backed up and the supply of caskets ran short. As priests began to fall ill, and even die, so did their family members. Thirty-six-year-old Anna Solanka contracted influenza while aiding her husband, Fr. Andrew, as he ministered to ill parishioners in Slovan, Pennsylvania. Theirs was a crowded home, their ten children ranging from 10 months to 18 years. When Anna succumbed to pneumonia on December 5, Fr. Andrew and their eldest two children themselves were enduring severe cases of influenza. While all three survived, only Anna's brother was healthy enough to travel to Scranton for her funeral.³²

In early November, Bishop Alexander addressed the concerns of clergy and clerical families in *Golos Tserkvi* (*Voice of the Church*), the newspaper of the Russian Orthodox Clergy League. Twenty priests had already contracted influenza, and four had died. Echoing his words at Bakunoff's graveside, Alexander praised clergy for their "heroic *podvigs*" amidst an epidemic "raging with all the strength of hell," and which was "terrible retribution God has sent to all America." Alexander noted with admiration that priests continued to go into the hospital wards and homes of sick parishioners "without any kinds of safety masks and disinfectants," even ministering to Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic patients. He wrote of a frightened clergy wife in Pennsylvania who challenged her husband as he left their home to hear the confessions of eight afflicted parishioners, even though he had no personal protective equipment. The priest responded by making the sign of the cross. "No other remedies will help!," he explained. Another missionary showed little concern even after he contracted influenza from a parishioner. "What if I die?," he exclaimed when Alexander visited his bedside. "On a missionary post, why, this is good fortune!" Alexander's clergy had helped him to understand the epidemic as an opportunity for missionaries to model selfless devotion, even martyrdom. "We are not afraid of any disease," one priest told him. "We go fearlessly into the maw of death."³³

Though Alexander directed priests to continue their *podvig* amongst the sick and dying, public health measures intended to curb the spread of the virus frequently limited their ability to do so. Measures such as closing saloons, restricting commerce,

31. William C. Hunt and Edward M. Bliss, *Religious Bodies 1916, Part II: Separate Denominations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 261; *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789–1945* (Washington, DC: United States Bureau of the Census, 1949), 68. All inflation calculations are according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator, computed from September 1918 to June 2020. See http://bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm, accessed July 15, 2020.

32. "Sumnaia vvest," *Svit*, January 2, 1919.

33. "Znaye truzhdaiushchikhsia u vas (Vernym chadam Russko-Amerikanskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii – o geroiskikh podvigakh ikh pastyrei)," *Golos Tserkvi*, November 7, 1918.

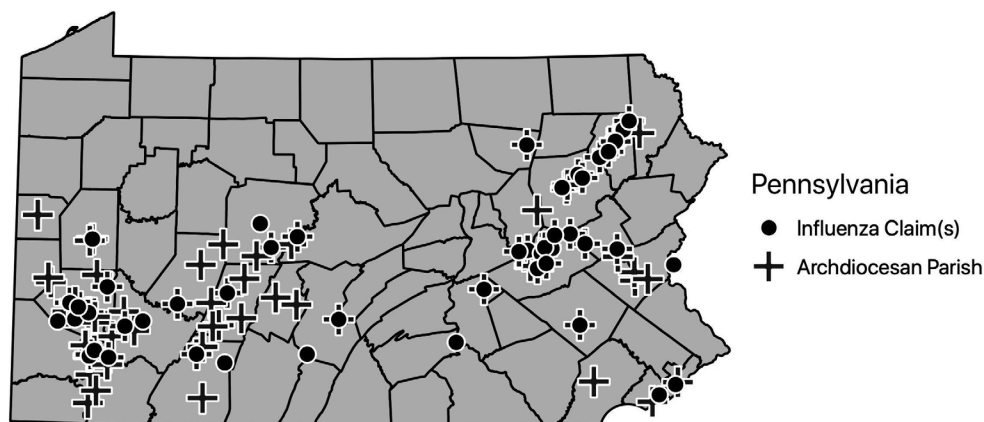


Figure 4. Influenza-related ROCMAS mortality claims and Russian Archdiocese parishes in Pennsylvania, October-December 1918 (Map by the author).

and canceling public events had a profound impact on slowing infections, though, were unevenly applied. Some municipalities delayed or even cut short their directives, while others were reluctant to close churches and synagogues, even as they shuttered physically similar spaces like movie theaters.³⁴ In Philadelphia, an ill-timed Liberty Loan parade in late September caused a citywide spike in cases, prompting the city to close its churches. Influenza also rippled across northeast Pennsylvania, where both archdiocesan parishes and ROCMAS chapters were numerous (see fig. 4). By mid-October, the state's health commissioner recommended but did not require municipalities to order places of worship to close, though many did.³⁵ When church closures went into effect in Pennsylvania, Alexander declared the epidemic "purely of the Antichrist" and laid out guidelines for how devotional practices should be suitably adapted. "But can we really cease to pray and remove Divine protection from American Orthodox Rus'?!," he asked. "No!" If general worship was prohibited, he reasoned, "no one will forbid a priest and *psalomshchik* [chanter] . . . to enter the church and serve the Divine Liturgy out of the sad necessity of absences." Such liturgies would be offered by a few on behalf of all. "So then serve the Divine Liturgy EARLY, fathers and brothers," he wrote. "Let not our churches be silent on Sundays and feast days!"

Alexander assumed that those who remained at home already maintained prayer rules and possessed sophisticated liturgical knowledge, and could manage the absence of common worship. "I know that some Godly families have the custom of gathering together in the best room" he wrote, "and here under the direction of the

34. Martin C. J. Bootsma and Neil M. Ferguson, "The Effect of Public Health Measures on the 1918 Influenza Pandemic in U.S. Cities," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 104, no. 18 (May 1, 2007): 7591.

35. James E. Higgins, "A Lost History: Writing the Influenza Epidemic in Pennsylvania, 1918–1922," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 85 (Summer 2018): 394–405; Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic*, 70–90.

head of the house sing the vespers, matins, [and] liturgy.” Priests were instructed that this was a suitable though only temporary substitute for church prayer. “Explain to the people, persuade them that each Sunday morning, all Orthodox families ought to gather in their own homes in common prayer,” he wrote. “If they do not have books, or if they are not able to sing the vespers or matins, let them sing a few church songs, or pray aloud.”³⁶ Alexander’s instructions guided how believers adapted familiar patterns of devotion to the uncertainties of a viral epidemic.

Numerous members of Fr. Peter Kohanik’s parish in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, had contracted influenza. Ten had died. In a letter to the parish, Kohanik noted that their tragic losses were still less than communities that had seen deaths upwards of 20 or 30. “It was God’s will to unleash this unprecedentedly contagious illness upon our country and likewise upon the environs of Wilkes-Barre,” Kohanik wrote in *Svit*. “Aside from medical and physical precautions already described in previous editions of *Svit*, as Christians, we should offer prayers to the Lord for our speedy deliverance and that of our loved ones from this disease.” While Kohanik valued individual devotions, he believed that “church prayer is higher than home prayer.” Given the open-ended nature of the church closure order, Kohanik decided to hold a weekly prayer service [*molieben*] in the church, during which “a single candle for each family shall be burned.” He designated lay parish leaders from each of the city’s neighborhoods to collect much-needed candle donations from interested families. A shuttered church, after all, meant the lost revenues of a closed candle stand.³⁷ While Kohanik and other clergy worshipped alone in their churches, other aspects of liturgical life were brought outdoors. This was most evident in the ways communities tended to the dead. When churches were closed, funeral services were held in cemeteries, often within a day or two of death and with only a few family members or friends present. In Colver, Pennsylvania, ROCMAS member Dimitrii Varga was mourned only by the membership of his brotherhood. Varga had been a zealous member of their brotherhood and especially of the Colver parish, which he served as a chanter and parish trustee. A friend wrote in *Svit* that with Varga’s loss, “a heavy blow struck our parish,” as to bury such an active member without a funeral in their church felt sad and incomplete.³⁸

Regular worship was adapted as well. In mid-October, ROCMAS member Aleksandr Pyza traveled to attend an outdoor liturgy at a church in Erie, Pennsylvania, which was actually a renovated home in the shadow of the city’s iron and steel foundries. The local ROCMAS chapter had been instrumental in forming the parish, Erie’s first. Pyza arrived to find a large crowd outside the “well-decorated and beautifully adorned” house church that included Russians, Romanians, and even some Episcopalians (*Angliki*) and Italian Catholics. Vespers and the liturgy were celebrated in the yard in Church Slavonic and Romanian. ROCMAS members lined up to hold candles on either side of the improvised altar. Pyza felt it little different than a “cathedral

36. “Vo khristyie vozliublennym pastyriam amerikanskoi pravoslavnoi rusi,” *Golos Tserkvi*, October 17, 1918.

37. “Bratchikam i parokhianam vilkes–barrskoi spaso-voskresenskoi tserkvi,” *Svit*, October 24, 1918.

38. “Iz Kolver, Pa,” *Svit*, December 12, 1918.

service," impressed that "here, Russian Orthodox people are gathered round; here, children stand with mothers, women and men sing at the *kliros*." The community's eagerness to worship in the yard of their house church with such comfort and confidence made Pyza feel "as if a church had stood in Erie for twenty years."³⁹ Public gathering bans altered national church life as well. Amidst financial and administrative crises related to the rise of Bolshevism, the Russian Archdiocese planned to convene an All-American *Sobor* (council) in Cleveland in early November. Church officials soon learned, however, that Cleveland's acting health commissioner, H. L. Rockwood, was enforcing stringent mitigation measures to curb an outbreak across northeast Ohio. The city cleaned its streets, distributed thousands of cloth masks from the Red Cross, and waged a "war on spitting." It closed schools, restaurants, and saloons. Then in mid-October, Rockwood closed places of worship. Over protests from Christian and Jewish communities (100 clergymen went door to door to drum up support), Rockwood extended his order into November.⁴⁰

Despite these measures, archdiocesan leadership still hoped to hold the council as scheduled. When two Cleveland-area priests approached Rockwood for necessary permits, he politely turned them down. Acknowledging the prevalence of influenza in his archdiocese, Bishop Alexander issued a directive explaining his agreement with Rockwood. While parishes should delay the election of council delegates, he reminded archdiocesan clergy that "priests should not go away from their parishes but should remain in place for the parting words of the afflicted and the burial of the deceased." The *sobor* would eventually meet in Cleveland, but not until February 1919.⁴¹ The circumstances surrounding the delay of the Cleveland *sobor* is but one indication that American Orthodox Rus' did not resist distancing and mitigation measures that altered their religious practices and transformed their everyday lives. When churches closed, clergy and their congregations generally complied, freely modifying religious obligations and activities to the circumstances of an invisible and terrifying viral epidemic. And despite perilous risks to themselves and their families, priests continued to minister to the afflicted and comfort those who mourned, but there were pressures on other bonds of assistance and comfort. While the church had adapted to spiritually help the sick and dying, other aspects of American Orthodox Rus' struggled to maintain commitments for financial and material aid for victims of the epidemic.

39. Aleksandr Pyza, "Pi'sma v redaktsiiu," *Svit*, November 21, 1918.

40. "Isolation Will Be Used in Flu Fight," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 5, 1918; "Wars on Spitting to Help Avoid Flu," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 6, 1918; "How Cleveland Fights Flu," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 14, 1918; "One Service in Churches," *Cleveland Press*, November 4, 1918. See also *The American Influenza Epidemic of 1918–1919: A Digital Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Cleveland, Ohio," <https://www.influenzaarchive.org/cities/city-cleveland.html>, accessed July 3, 2020.

41. "Bogokhraminyum, vo khristyve vozliublennym pastyriam i pasomym amerikanskoi pravoslav. Rusi," *Golos Tserkvi*, November 7, 1918. "Conventions Postponed," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 30, 1918. Church historians maintain that the decision to postpone the *sobor* was purely economical, given difficult financial conditions within the national church and local parishes alike. See Afonsky, *History of the Orthodox Church*, 29–32; Tarasar, *Orthodox America*, 178–81; "The 2nd All-American Sobor," *Orthodox Church in America*, <https://www.oca.org/history-archives/aacs/2nd-all-american-sobor>, accessed July 3, 2020.

3.

Fr. Alexander Lupinovich's casket was taken by train to New York, where clergy from the St. Nicholas Cathedral in Manhattan served a *litiya* for the deceased priest on the railway station platform.⁴² The journey continued to Scranton, Pennsylvania. Before Fr. Alexander was taken to the Monastery of St. Tikhon for burial, his body was transferred into a copper coffin at Natalia Lupinovich's insistence. She hoped that in time, his remains might be disinterred so they could be buried together in Russia. Like many other missionary priests, Alexander Lupinovich viewed service in America as a temporary adventure that might advance a long clerical career at home.⁴³

Soon after the funeral, Natalia filed for her husband's \$750 ROCMAS mortality policy.⁴⁴ Founded in 1895 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, ROCMAS served important ethnic, spiritual, and fraternal roles for its members. "Our society is RUSSIAN," it was explained, "for it aims to spread in America the ideal of a united, indivisible Rus' . . . and generally endeavors for the enlightenment of the Russian people in a Russian spirit in feelings of love and devotion to Russian nationality [*narodnost'*]." It was Orthodox, "for it endeavors for the spread and adoption of the Orthodox Christian Faith in America," and because "its members must be only people Orthodox in faith."⁴⁵ Within the Russian Archdiocese, this dual emphasis served an important purpose. Ministering to a flock significantly comprised of former Greek Catholics who defined themselves in nuanced ethnic terms, the archdiocese pointedly encouraged Russified Orthodox identities for believers who frequently maintained their familial and social ties with so-called Uniates.⁴⁶

While much has been written about the critical role of mutual aid and fraternal societies within vulnerable religious and ethnic groups in the early twentieth-century United States, the histories of similar Orthodox organizations are less known. ROCMAS was a specifically Orthodox solution to the problem of immigrant insecurity. Such organizations had existed in Europe, then were brought to North America by

42. Along with Lupinovich's death notice, church newspapers also published a schedule assigning priests across the archdiocese to offer prayers in their churches for the deceased priest until the fortieth day after his passing. "Zhurnal sobraniia chlenov S.-Amerikanskago Dukh. Pravleniia Sent. 24-go 1918 goda," *Golos Tserkvi*, October 10, 1918.

43. "Pamiati missionera," *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, October-November-December 1918, 125. For more on the motivations of Orthodox missionary priests, see Sarkisian, *Between Hammer and Sickle*, 92–102.

44. "Otchet o chlenakh po russk. pravoslavnomu kaf. ob-vu vzaimopomoshchi," *Svit*, December 19, 1918.

45. Russkoe pravoslavnoe kafol. obshchestvo vzaimopomoshchi v syevero-amerikanskikh soedinnennykh shtatakhk XX-lyetnemu iubileiu (New York: *Svit*, 1915), 13.

46. For dynamics of conversion and identity in Carpatho-Rusyn communities, see Joel Brady, *Transnational Conversions: Greek Catholic Migrants and Russky Orthodox Conversion Movements in Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Americas (1890–1914)* (PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 138–39. As late as the 1960s, ROCMAS publications routinely included material that was virulently anti-Catholic and often crudely dismissive of Ukrainian language, identity, and culture.

myriad ethnic and religious groups.⁴⁷ Slavic migrants had known precarity in Europe, as Ewa Morawska has noted, but experienced it anew and on more befuddling terms in the industrial United States. As a result, they harbored what Morawska calls a "fundamental concern with security."⁴⁸ The migrant believers of American Orthodox Rus' greatly valued organizations that could offer both fraternal support and material aid, especially in moments of acute need.

The difficulties, hardships, danger, and low pay of industrial work were constant struggles for Orthodox workers, whether one ladled molten steel, shoveled coal, manned an assembly line, or fed a textile loom. Though some benefitted from early forms of corporate welfare, few looked forward to company pensions. Federal Social Security benefits were still decades away. Though states like Pennsylvania required companies to pay medical costs for workers injured on the job, period evidence suggests these benefits were inconsistently disbursed.⁴⁹ Workers and their families turned instead to ethnic and religious organizations like ROCMAS.

The society was governed by its national offices in Wilkes-Barre, but the bulk of social support and even some financial benefits were handled at the local level. Named after a spiritual patron, each ROCMAS *bratstvo* (brotherhood) typically operated in parallel with a parish, usually with the cooperation of its pastor.⁵⁰ Some of these parishes were founded by ROCMAS brotherhoods, and built their temples using society grants.⁵¹ By 1918, most of the society's 225 chapters were found in coal and steel towns of Pennsylvania and other industrial centers of the Northeast. There were also chapters in far-flung places like Cle Elum, Washington, Hartshorne, Oklahoma, and Slovaktown, Arkansas, where distance and somewhat smaller Orthodox populations only heightened the need for familiar institutions.

The viability of a benevolence society like ROCMAS depended on its ability to maintain membership levels, collect dues, and carefully balance available funds against anticipated policy disbursements. In 1918, ROCMAS offered four levels of mortality policies: \$250, \$500, \$750, and \$1,000 (between \$4,105 and \$16,420 in 2020 dollars). Monthly dues were proportional to age (membership was limited to those aged 16 to 45) and set according to tables prepared by the National Fraternal

47. John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 120–30. For contemporary observations, see Balch, *Slavic Fellow Citizens*, 378–84; Davis, *The Russian Immigrant*, 27–30.

48. Ewa Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 9.

49. U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Bituminous Coal Mining*, vol. 6, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 96.

50. Though *bratstvo* reflects the masculine "brotherhood," chapters frequently included both men and women. A separate organization, the Russian Orthodox Women's Mutual Aid Society (*Russkoe Pravoslavnoe Zhenskoe Obshchestvo Vzaimopomoshchi*), was founded in 1907 and based in Coaldale, Pennsylvania. It offered death benefits policies of \$250 or \$500 for women aged 16 through 45. "Russkoe Pravoslavnoe Zhenskoe Obshchestvo Vzaimopomoshchi." *Svit* (advertisement), June 13, 1918.

51. Between 1895 and 1915, 94 communities received a total of \$33,000 in such grants. Russian Orthodox Catholic Mutual Aid Society, "Tserkovnyia zapomogi vydany tserkvam v slyediushchikh gorodakh i seleniakh," 70th Anniversary Booklet, 1965, 51–54.

Congress of America. Members who suffered debilitating illness or injury were guaranteed between 31 and 46 weeks of benefits, depending on their policy. In case of death, their beneficiaries received their full policy amount.⁵²

By design, each member held a small stake in the society's finances, and its resources ebbed and flowed along patterns of new enrollments, expulsions, and deaths. Membership changes were meticulously listed by name in *Svit*. In the summer of 1918, the society was on generally solid financial footing. The monthly dues of 9,700 members allowed benefits disbursements to be steady and manageable. During the first nine months of 1918, ROCMAS received six mortality claims per month on average, and never more than nine. Given the society's policy levels, the society might have disbursed as little as \$250 or as much as \$9,000 in any given month (between \$4,105 and \$147,782 in 2020 dollars).⁵³

Then came the influenza epidemic. In October 1918, 92 mortality claims were filed. Fifty-six came in November, then 65 in December. In just three months, 213 ROCMAS members died from influenza, slightly more than 2 percent of the society's membership. They were men and women ranging in age from mid-teens to early fifties, though most were in their twenties and thirties. At least 107 chapters—around half of the total number—lost at least one member to influenza. Losses were greatest in the heavily-concentrated coal and steel regions of Pennsylvania, where many towns had multiple chapters. The St. Nicholas Brotherhood of Edwardsville, Pennsylvania, a coal town near Wilkes-Barre, lost 10 members, 7 in November alone. The greatest losses were in Wilkes-Barre, numbering 19 members across its 4 chapters. Collectively, ROCMAS owed their beneficiaries \$146,000 in mortality benefits (\$2.4 million in 2020 dollars).⁵⁴

Each of the 213 claims carried a unique story of tragedy. There were six ROCMAS chapters in Mayfield, Pennsylvania, a heavily Slavic coal town between Scranton and Carbondale. During October and November, 28 influenza victims were buried in its Russian Orthodox Cemetery. Nine were children or infants. Nearly half were male coal workers, from a 14-year-old slate packer to a 54-year-old miner. There were housewives, domestic workers, and a "silk girl." Many of the adults were ROCMAS members. Among them was Anna Serafin, 34, of the Assumption Sisterhood. Six belonged to the Ss. Boris and Gleb Brotherhood, including Michael Serafin, Anna's 38-year-old husband.⁵⁵

52. "Russkoe Pravoslavnoe Obshchestvo Vazimopomoshchi i Ego Vorogi," *Svit*, October 16, 1919.

53. See monthly reports, "Otchet o chlenakh po russk. pravoslavnomu kaf. ob-vu vzaimopomoshchi," *Svit*, February 7, 1918; February 28, 1918; March 27, 1918; May 2, 1918; May 30, 1918; June 27, 1918; August 15, 1918; September 26, 1918; October 24, 1918; and October 31, 1918.

54. *Svit* published four separate influenza mortality benefits reports: regular monthly reports for November, December, and January (benefits claims were recorded a month after the member's death), and a fourth cumulative report published in March. Deaths were listed by chapter number. See "Otchet o chlenakh po russk. pravoslavnomu kaf. ob-vu vzaimopomoshchi," *Svit*, December 19, 1918; January 9, 1919; and February 6, 1919; "Spisok umershikh ot 'influentzii chlenov russk. pravosl. obshchestva vazimopomoshchi," *Svit*, March 13, 1919.

55. This data was compiled by consulting all death certificates filed in Mayfield between October and December of 1918. I have counted only those certificates that record influenza as either the

Anna and Michael Serafin's difficulties speak to the importance of ROCMAS for working-class Orthodox families. Anna first married in 1903 when she was 18. In 1910, her husband died in a mine collapse, leaving her with their two sons. A widower and father of two, Michael had himself suffered hip and leg fractures in a mining accident, then found safer work running a hotel. Michael and Anna married in Mayfield in 1911, and subsequently had two children of their own. On October 20, 1918, the day after their youngest daughter celebrated her second birthday, Michael served as the informant on Anna's death certificate and that of another family member, "Still Born Serafin." Michael died the next day. All three were buried in the Russian Orthodox Cemetery on October 22. The \$1,000 ROCMAS mortality policies Michael and Anna each held helped provide for their surviving children.⁵⁶

As those laid to rest in Mayfield suggest, ROCMAS represented only one subset of American Orthodox Rus'. The society's mortality statistics reflect only the deaths of working-age adult members. They do not account for nonfatal cases within its membership, nor the illnesses and deaths of thousands more adult nonmembers, elders, and children. Even so, ROCMAS statistics and subsequent research on the epidemic offer preliminary clues for how influenza affected American Orthodox Rus'. Health experts speculate that 25 percent of the United States population contracted influenza. ROCMAS had around 9,700 members when the epidemic began. Thus, it is possible that nearly 2,500 members fell ill. Given the epidemic's unusually high morbidity among working-age adults, the society's exclusive demographic, the actual figure was likely higher. When projected across American Orthodox Rus' in general, total morbidity and mortality was almost certainly much greater.⁵⁷

Such prevalence of influenza infections shows that the frightening experiences and heavy responsibilities of the epidemic certainly were shared across communities, and by necessity. To a significant extent, adult migrant believers arrived in American Orthodox Rus' alone. As the death of Dimitrii Varga in Colver, Pennsylvania, suggests, workplaces, neighborhoods, and especially churches replicated the multigenerational, far-reaching kinship networks immigrant believers left behind. In ROCMAS chapters, mutual aid took on amplified, far deeper meanings than mere financial benefits. When members of a brotherhood died, other members often and instinctively assumed responsibilities usually reserved for kin.

primary or secondary cause of death and with interment reported in the Mayfield Russian Orthodox Cemetery. Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission, *Pennsylvania (State) Death Certificates, 1906–1967*, viewed on Ancestry.com. Certificate number ranges 124201–124500; 166201–166350; and 188851–189000.

56. Michael Serafin, Stillborn Serafin, and Anna Serafin. Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission, *Pennsylvania (State) Death Certificates, 1906–1967*, viewed on Ancestry.com. Certificate numbers 124404, 124405, and 124407; Public Family Tree Entry, "Anna Pawuak Sytch Serafin," viewed on Ancestry.com. <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/36810123/person/28086581745/facts>, last accessed July 8, 2020.

57. Adding to the speculative nature of these statistics, Crosby also points to evidence that influenza cases were remarkably underreported. Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic*, 203–7.

One such example occurred in Boswell, a coal town in southwestern Pennsylvania. Over just three days in October, Yurii and Maria Kovach and two of their four children succumbed to influenza. The secretary of Boswell's Holy Spirit Brotherhood turned to ROCMAS for help in aiding the surviving children, ages five and three. "The trouble is that a place cannot be found for them in these times," the secretary explained. He asked if the church-run Russian Orphanage in Springfield, Vermont, might take them in and what should be done with Yurii and Maria's mortality benefits. Fr. Peter Kohanik responded with advice and comfort. "Your sadness is truly without precedent," he wrote, "yet we are all obliged to kneel before the will of the Lord God Almighty." He advised the children be sent to Springfield and promised that ROCMAS would transfer their parents' benefits there.⁵⁸

Kohanik's public offering of assistance to the Boswell *bratstvo* came as he was privately fretting that ROCMAS lacked sufficient reserve funds to meet obligations to beneficiaries like the orphaned Kovach children. In early November, chapters were instructed not to wait until their brotherhoods met to remit monthly dues to the national organization. It was feared that public meeting bans like those in place across Pennsylvania would cause members to delay placing deposits in local chapter accounts precisely when the national organization most needed the funds.⁵⁹ Within a month, there were 120 death claims, with more arriving each week. When Kohanik called an extraordinary meeting of the society's leadership in mid-December, there was \$120,000 in outstanding disbursements. By month's end, the sum had grown to \$146,000, and would ultimately top \$160,000 (between \$1.97 million and \$2.62 million in 2020 dollars). In order to both remain solvent and honor their responsibilities to more than 200 beneficiaries, ROCMAS needed to raise the difference—and quickly.

State insurance regulations limited the extent to which ROCMAS could draw on financial reserves once the mortality fund was depleted. The society's statutes obligated the general membership to cover the outstanding amount, which Kohanik calculated at nearly \$110,000 (\$1.8 million in 2020 dollars). Following the guidance of the National Fraternal Congress of America, a special monthly assessment would be imposed in the amount of one-tenth of 1 percent of each member's policy amount. Each member would pay between \$0.25 and \$1 each month, and a total of \$4.50 to \$18 over the 18 months needed to pay the balance in full (between \$74 and \$296 in 2020 dollars; see table 1). Members were to remit their assessment payments to the local brotherhood alongside their regular monthly dues. The national office planned to take out short-term loans each month, to be repaid as assessment funds arrived. Barring another wave of illness, the influenza deficit would be met by late 1920, with minimal impact on normal operations.⁶⁰ By the time the assessment went into effect in early

58. "Iz bozvela," *Svit*, November 7, 1918. It does not appear that the Kovach children were taken to Springfield. Neither appears in the 1920 United States Census schedule for the orphanage.

59. "Do uvagi pochtennykh bratstv i chlenov obshchestva vzaimopomoshchi," *Svit*, November 7, 1918.

60. "Do uvagi vsekh bra-v i chlenov obshchestva," *Svit*, January 2, 1919; "Nepremyennomu vni-maniiu vsyex chlenov russkogo pravoslavnogo obshchestva vzaimopomoshchi," *Svit*, January 30, 1919.

Table 1. Statistical breakdown of ROCMAS mortality policies and extra assessment payments, January 1919.

<i>Policy Amount</i>	<i>Number of Policies</i>	<i>Yield of Extra Assessment</i>	<i>Total (18 months)</i>
\$250.00	931	\$232.75	\$4,189.50
\$500.00	4637	\$2,318.50	\$41,733.00
\$750.00	931	\$698.25	\$12,568.50
\$1,000.00	3142	\$3,142.00	\$56,556.00
Total	9641	\$6,391.50	\$115,047.00

("Nepremyennomu vnimaniiu vsyex chlenov russkogo pravoslavnogo obshchestva vzaimopomoshchi." *Svit*, January 30, 1919)

1919, perhaps more than half of influenza-related death claims, upwards of \$100,000 (\$1.64 million in 2020 dollars), remained to be disbursed.⁶¹ Unexpectedly, however, one-third of the organization—74 chapters—refused to pay their share. Among them was the Assumption Brotherhood of Maynard, Massachusetts, whose members had carried their pastor through the streets of their town only months earlier and then helped Natalia Lupinovich claim his mortality benefits.⁶² ROCMAS leadership cited their bylaws to expel these chapters and their members from the society. This manifested a drastic, unprecedented shift in the society's ranks. Since its founding in 1895, ROCMAS had endured only two rather slight annual membership losses. In 1919, the society expelled a record 3,268 members. In less than a year, expulsions and influenza deaths contributed to a net membership decrease of more than 20 percent.⁶³

Dissenting chapters like the Maynard brotherhood alleged that the extra assessment was the result of mismanagement, not misfortune. To anyone who picked up a ROCMAS publication, the society might have appeared meticulous and transparent. *Svit* published detailed monthly membership reports and long lists of financial contributions, no matter how small. In 1915, the society's twentieth-anniversary commemorative booklet offered a detailed appraisal of all properties and assets, down to

For National Fraternal Congress of America directives, see "Are Extra Assessments Needed Because of Spanish Influenza?," *Fraternal Monitor*, January 1, 1919, 14; "Meeting of the Presidents' Section of the National Fraternal Congress of America," *Fraternal Monitor*, March 1, 1919, 11. For tensions between private insurance and fraternal organizations over influenza assessments, see "The Epidemic," *Fraternal Monitor*, December 1919, 15–16. See also Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 67. For ROCMAS and Fraternal Congress directives, see "Dolznomu vnimaniiu vsyekh chlenov russkogo pravoslavnogo obva vzaimopomoshchi," *Svit*, May 18, 1919.

61. "Financial Statement," *Svit*, October 16, 1919.

62. A partial list of the dissenting chapters was published in *Svit*: "Ne platiashchii bratstva," *Svit*, May 1, 1919.

63. "Nagliadnaia tablitsa dal'nyeishago rosta chlenstva nashego obshchestva vzaimopomoshchi," 70th Anniversary, *Russkoe pravoslavnoe obshchestvo vzaimo-pomoshchi v syev-amerikanskix soedinen-nykh shtatakh* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: Tipografiia gazety "Svyet," 1965), 32–33.

a ten-cent water tankard in its Wilkes-Barre offices.⁶⁴ Critics now alleged, however, that while ROCMAS publicly portrayed itself as financially healthy and seemingly handled thousands of dollars in income and disbursements each month without incident, it had also consistently failed to file proper financial statements with state regulators. In a letter to Pennsylvania insurance commissioner Thomas B. Donaldson, a lawyer representing a dissenting chapter in Pittsburgh argued that given the lack of financial reports, “the department should institute proceeding [sic] to prohibit the society from doing business.”⁶⁵ Kohanik responded by opening the society’s files to Donaldson. The commissioner discovered that ROCMAS had indeed failed to file proper reports until mid-1918, yet this was “due to pure ignorance and to being misinformed by their attorney.” He felt the society’s leadership had acted within their bylaws both to impose an extra assessment and to expel those chapters that refused to pay. What was more, Donaldson was made to understand (likely by Kohanik, who exuded similarly fervent strains of American patriotism in *Svit* throughout the war) that “the majority of the brotherhoods have paid the extra assessment and that most of these members are American citizens; while those opposed . . . are not American citizens and no doubt have little or no intention of remaining in this country.”⁶⁶

While ROCMAS leadership encouraged Donaldson to interpret noncompliance as unpatriotic disloyalty, it perhaps more accurately indicated preexisting tensions between chapters and the national organization or even within chapters themselves, which were exacerbated by the experience of the influenza epidemic. One such example was the St. Gregory Brotherhood of Homestead, Pennsylvania. “Many brotherhood members went where there is no return” during the epidemic, a chapter history later noted, yet those who remained recoiled at the extra assessment that would help pay their mortality benefits. After the chapter was expelled, less than half of its membership eventually came to agree to the assessment and restarted their *bratstvo*, although it imposed a strange stipulation that former members “were invited to return only after a new examination by a doctor.” It was retribution disguised as an attempt to ensure that only healthy members joined the chapter. These stipulations continued for more than five years, a period recalled as “a time of troubles [*smutnoe vremia*]” for the Homestead community, in which “it became difficult to attract new members into the brotherhood’s ranks.” It was only after an influx of new leadership and a vigorous membership campaign in 1926 that the St. Gregory Brotherhood recovered.⁶⁷

64. “Obshchestvennyi inventar’ k 1 maiu 1915 g,” *Russkoe pravoslavnoe kafol. obshchestvo vazimopomoshchi i syevero-amerikanskikh soedinnennykh shtatakh XX-lyetnemu iubileiu* (New York: *Svit*, 1915), 128.

65. R. J. Lucksha to Hon. Thomas B. Donaldson, August 28, 1919, *Svit*, October 16, 1919.

66. “Russkoe Pravoslavnoe Obshchestvo Vazimopomoshchi i Ego Vorogi,” *Svit*, October 16, 1919. For Kohanik’s patriotic activism during the World War I, see Sarkisian, *Between Hammer and Sickle*, 148–52. For a general biography, see Bogdan Horbal, “Kohanik, Peter/Kokhanik, Petr,” in *Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture*, Paul Magocsi, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 241; and “Skonchalsia Protopyesviter Petr Kokhanik,” *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, June 1969, 82–83.

67. S. Shkoda, “Kratkaia istoria bratstva Sv. Grigoriia Bogoslova v g. gomsted, pensil’vaniia (1912–1943),” in *Iubileinyi Sbornik v Pamyat’ 150-lietia Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v Sievernoi Amerikie*, Tom

With a shrinking membership and extra assessments rolling in too slowly at the national level, ROCMAS struggled to remain solvent. In the summer of 1920, as its twenty-fifth anniversary general convention approached, an article in *Svit* asked a simple question: "Why are we not financially strong?" The answer, it seemed, was the remaining influenza epidemic deficit.⁶⁸ Some of the expelled brotherhoods wished to rejoin ROCMAS and be represented at the convention, even as they continued to criticize the society's leadership in the Russian-language press. Kohanik lamented that these former members had "woken up" only after other chapters had done their part and after they had "set off a great fiasco" by demanding the Pennsylvania Insurance Commission shut down the society.⁶⁹ Meeting in Wilkes-Barre without the dissenting chapters, the general convention ratified nearly 200 changes to the society's bylaws. These included state-mandated increases to monthly membership rates. These increases were set slightly higher for new members, including, pointedly, any former member previously expelled from the society.⁷⁰ This was not a warm entreaty for former members to rejoin, and in 1920, ROCMAS membership sagged further. In the decades that followed the influenza epidemic, the society's membership never again exceeded 7,500.⁷¹

4.

The influenza epidemic ebbed in the United States after a small third wave in early 1919. The cotton masks came off and patterns of normalcy resumed. In early 2020, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) altered American life anew, inviting comparisons to what had happened a century before. COVID-19 emerged in the United States as Great Lent began. By Holy Week, every Orthodox jurisdiction and diocese had imposed restrictions limiting common worship, including in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), the successor jurisdiction to the early-twentieth century Russian Archdiocese. On Holy Saturday night in 2020, a shaky, handheld camera followed Metropolitan Tikhon (Mollard) as he circled the church of St. Tikhon Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. The procession passed near the cemetery where

Vtoroi (New York: 1945), 252–53. In response to another extra assessment, the Homestead brotherhood joined the competing Russian Consolidated Mutual Aid Society (ROOVA) in 1935.

68. "Pro shcho my ne sil'ny finansovo?," *Svit*, June 3, 1920.

69. "O vystupivshikh i iskluchennykh chlenakh iz obshchestva," *Svit*, June 3, 1920. See also "K iubileinoi konventsii russkogo prav. ob-va vazimopomoshchi," *Svit*, June 17, 1920; "Konets pravoslavnago obshchestva," *Golos Tserkvi*, June 17, 1920; "K spletniam 'golosa tserkvi,'" *Prikarpat'skaia Rus'*, June 25, 1920.

70. "Will Meet Next Year at Yonkers." *Wilkes-Barre Evening News*, n.d., reprinted in *Svit*, June 24, 1920.

71. "Nagliadnaia tablitsa dal'nyeishago rosta chlenstva nashego obshchestva vazimopomoshchi," 70th Anniversary, *Russkoe pravoslavnoe obshchestvo vazimo-pomoshchi v syev.-amerikanskikh soedinenykh shtatakh* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: Tipografiia gazety "Svyet," 1965), 32–33.

Fr. Alexander Lupinovich was buried in 1918 and a monument had been erected in memory of all departed ROCMAS members. In 1918, Fr. Peter Kohanik prayed alone, surrounded by candles representing the families of his parish. Over a century later, a new generation of Orthodox families gathered around computers, televisions, and iPads to worship with the metropolitan, then opened PDF files to follow instructions for blessing their Paschal food baskets themselves.⁷²

In early 2020, just as during the influenza epidemic, believers' homes once again became centers of church life, this time gathering clouds of witnesses in Zoom gallery mode. Clergy heard confessions over the phone. Children attended virtual church school. Priests, deacons, singers, and altar servers coordinated service attendance to meet public health guidelines, locked the doors behind them, then switched on the cameras. "I am so grateful that I can be present at Liturgy, even if I have a hard time getting up in the morning," one believer wrote of her virtual worship experience. "God allows it to be right here. Right in my own home. How merciful and gracious He is to bend to my sinfulness, my weakness and darkness. He comes and brings worship and food right into my dark little world and enlightens it."⁷³ While some embraced these changes, others found the experience spiritually troubling, even metaphysically dubious. Just as influenza prompted questions of whether home prayer was a suitable substitute for a shuttered church during the COVID-19 pandemic, believers took to blogs, internet forums, and social media platforms to debate whether Orthodox liturgy experienced virtually was even worship at all. As state and municipal responses to COVID-19 became increasingly politicized, the Orthodox joined contentious conversations that juxtaposed constitutional ideals of religious freedom against church closures and public gathering bans. Some even questioned the intentions and motivations of bishops and clergy who enforced compliance, and as church leaders also suggested temporary changes to various liturgical practices, an impassioned debate emerged over the possibility of viral transmission through sacred objects such as icons, crosses, and Communion spoons.⁷⁴

Such disagreements—couched in political, spiritual, theological, and even metaphysical terms—show that while COVID-19 posed many of the same challenges to

72. "Midnight Office & Procession; Paschal Matins, Paschal Hour, & Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIHUCoNBghM>, accessed July 9, 2020. For one example of jurisdictional instructions for Pascha at home, see "Holy Week and Pascha Resources," *Orthodox Church in America*, <https://www.oca.org/holy-week-pascha-resources>, accessed July 9, 2020.

73. Tanya Penkrat, "Thoughts about Liturgy in the Time of Coronavirus," *Axia Women*, May 1, 2020, <https://www.axiawomen.org/blog/thoughts-about-liturgy-time-corona-virus>, accessed July 3, 2020.

74. For aspects of this debate from scholarly perspectives, see Elena Romashko, "When Icons Make You Sick," *Public Orthodoxy*, April 26, 2020; and Daniel Galadza, "'Remember, O Lord . . .': Liturgy, History, and Communion Spoons in a Time of Pandemic," *Public Orthodoxy*, May 21, 2020. See also Alexei Krindatch, "Holy Communion during the Pandemic in American Orthodox Christian Parishes," <https://orthodoxreality.org/coronavirus-%20and-american-orthodox-parishes/>, accessed November 14, 2020. See the August 2020 webinar on scientific and theological considerations of viral transmission through communion, "The Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Communion Practice in the Orthodox Church," <https://www.otsamerica.net/the-coronavirus-covid-19-and-communion-practice-in-the-orthodox-church/>, accessed June 23, 2021.

church life as the influenza epidemic, Orthodox Christians in the United States were far more self-sufficient and relied on their church markedly less than those a century before did. In the tightly-knit immigrant communities of 1918 American Orthodox Rus', parishes and parachurch entities such as fraternal organizations, benevolence societies, schools, and other institutions served critical functions (social, vocational, educational, and spiritual), yet with the passage of time, class mobility, assimilation, and suburbanization served to decentralize and even deemphasize the church's place in believers' lives. Believers instead came to rely on their churches more for spiritual fulfillment and religious obligation, necessitating far different kinds of responses and resources in response to COVID-19.

As the pandemic became a national crisis, jurisdictions and "pan-Orthodox" groups alike developed new resources to meet specific and evolving needs. The International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) compiled scripts for "care calls" with "prayer-oriented prompts" to counsel affected parishioners.⁷⁵ The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America established a COVID-19 relief fund for those experiencing short-term financial hardships.⁷⁶ The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops (ACOB) collated directives and resources from member jurisdictions, and offered messages from hierarchs to comfort the faithful. ACOB-produced resources offered detailed information on personal protective equipment, guidelines for clerical visitations, and suggestions for "safer Orthodox worship."⁷⁷ And when states and municipalities began to ease public health restrictions during the summer, ACOB compiled a "Parish Reopening Toolkit" to help communities tailor their activities to civil regulations, parish membership numbers, and even the size and ventilation of their worship spaces.⁷⁸

COVID-19 also inspired new approaches to Orthodox mutual aid. These were rooted in the same ideals of communal obligation of benevolence societies like ROCMAS, yet in much different, less institutional, and more temporary forms. Across the United States, the sheer scale of need prompted the formation of mutual aid groups that brought groceries to the homebound, crowdsourced personal protective equipment, and provided meals for "frontline" workers.⁷⁹ One such example was the Orthodox COVID19 Response Network (OCRN), which used Facebook to "organize the North American community on a grassroots level to ensure vulnerable

75. "Guidance and Script: Through the Storm, Together," International Orthodox Christian Charities (information sheet), <https://iocc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/IOCC-CareCallsScript-051420b.pdf>, accessed November 14, 2020.

76. "COVID-19 Relief Fund Application," Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (online application form), <https://www.goarch.org/covid19relief>, accessed July 3, 2020.

77. "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resource Center," Association of Canonical Bishops (online resource portal), <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/covid19>, accessed July 11, 2020.

78. "COVID-19 Parish Reopening Toolkit," Association of Canonical Bishops (online resource portal), <https://script.google.com/macros/s/AKfycbzDwz2l3VDJXt8P11wgI1WfmANjgnQr6KGwNCrThG5Buz5tpLE/exec>, accessed July 3, 2020.

79. Jia Tolentino, "What Mutual Aid Can Do During A Pandemic," *The New Yorker*, May 11, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/18/what-mutual-aid-can-do-during-a-pandemic>, accessed July 3, 2020.

members such as the elderly, infirmed [sic], and disabled have access to food, health-care, spiritual nourishment, and other necessities.” OCRN generated a series of hashtags to streamline their activities. #OFFER denoted a user with “something to give.” #CLERGY indicated “ordained Eastern Orthodox clergyman offering support.” Members compiled weekly prayer lists, raised funds to produce cloth masks, connected others with healthcare resources, and encouraged support for Orthodox-owned businesses.⁸⁰

The grassroots nature of temporary, emergency-driven endeavors like OCRN belied the extent to which Orthodox communities in the United States had long ago turned from the necessity for mutual aid insurance plans, as well as the established Orthodox fraternal and benevolence societies that offered them. Organizations like ROCMAS touted their benefits as long-term security against unexpected injury and loss and did so within their general missions to provide ethnic, religious, and social support to vulnerable, working-class people. The rise of corporate welfare in the 1920s, the social safety nets of the New Deal, and the growth and dominance of the private insurance industry in subsequent decades, however, almost entirely supplanted ethnic and religious insurance plans.⁸¹ Faced with substitutes for mutual-aid plans, many Orthodox *bratstvos* transformed into social and service-based clubs. At its seventieth anniversary in 1965, ROCMAS encompassed a quarter of its 1918 membership. By the 1990s, nearly every Orthodox mutual aid society active in the early twentieth century had discontinued its benefits programs, merged with another organization, or folded. In 2005, ROCMAS was absorbed by the Polish National Union of America, a fraternal organization affiliated with the Polish National Catholic Church.⁸² Today, the only Orthodox benevolence group offering insurance plans is the 120-year-old Russian Brotherhood Organization, which is based in eastern Pennsylvania.⁸³

While the material ramifications of the influenza epidemic on institutions like ROCMAS are clear, the lasting emotional and spiritual impacts of the epidemic on American Orthodox Rus’ are somewhat harder to measure. Like so many others, it seems that as the decades passed, those Orthodox believers who endured that epidemic tended not to dwell on their experiences. With the distance of history, the legacy of the so-called “forgotten” epidemic on American Orthodox Rus’, then, might be quantified in missed opportunities and lost potential. In a matter of months, at

80. “Orthodox COVID19 Response Network,” Facebook (online messaging group), <https://www.facebook.com/groups/OrthodoxChristianCOVID19ResponseNetwork/>, accessed July 3, 2020.

81. David Brody, “The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism,” in *Workers in Industrial America*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 48–81; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making A New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 159–212.

82. “In Re: Application of Polish National Union Of America Request For Approval To Merge With Russian Orthodox Catholic Mutual Aid Society” (Insurance Commission of Pennsylvania, 2005), <https://www.insurance.pa.gov/Companies/IndustryActivity/Documents/ID-RC-05-23A.pdf>, accessed July 3, 2020.

83. Russian Brotherhood of the USA (online home page), <http://www.rbo.org>, accessed July 3, 2020.

significant cost to himself and his family, the young missionary Fr. Maxim Bakunoff built a growing community in Whitman, West Virginia. After his death, the parish faded, leaving only a ROCMAS chapter. There would never be a permanent parish in Whitman.⁸⁴

The victims of the influenza epidemic nonetheless remained present in local historical memories, albeit in subtle ways. For aging believers whose habits and religious devotions included visits to parish cemeteries like the Russian Orthodox Cemetery in Mayfield, Pennsylvania, the graves of influenza victims were as much a tangible sign of absences felt as a reminder of how their communities collectively bore trauma and loss. "In the year of 1918, when the world was plagued with the flu," steel worker and lifelong Homestead, Pennsylvania parishioner Peter Mock wrote in 1964,

many hearts were broken with the horrible toll of deaths of our parishioners and especially of the children. Evidence of the heartbreak can be seen today at the old section of our cemetery, which had just then been acquired. The long row of small graves along the fence with tiny, some broken, headstones, attests to the magnitude of the sadness within our church.⁸⁵

Such experiences and legacies of the influenza epidemic of 1918 challenged believers' sense of individual and communal security in a strange new land, underscoring the extent to which working-class believers placed their well-being and survival within the wavering grasp of American Orthodox Rus'. What did it mean to fall ill so quickly or to watch others around you approach death when they were well only hours before? What was it like to provide information for a spouse's death certificate, knowing that your own time was dreadfully near? How did it feel to prepare the disfigured dead, then mourn them without a church funeral? Who would offer comfort if your priest had died? Who would provide if a breadwinner was gone? These were questions that resonated across American Orthodox Rus', though in elusive if imperceptible ways with the passage of time. Just as the future historian will not be able to ignore the significant and lasting impact of COVID-19 on Orthodoxy in the early twenty-first century United States, so must scholars similarly more deeply explore the influenza epidemic's similar effect during a pivotal and transformational period in the history of Orthodoxy on the North American continent.

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84. Russian-American Register, 1920 (New York: Russian-American Register Publishing, 1920), 134.

85. Peter Mock, "Diary of a Parish: Homestead, PA," in Tarasar, *Orthodox America*, 169–70.