

A Letter from Chancellor Very Rev. Fr. George Tsahakis



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS^{OF} ATLANTA
ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΤΛΑΝΤΑΣ

February 5, 2021

Dear Brother Clergy, Parish Council Presidents and Treasurers,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Following yesterday's email concerning the email impersonations of the Archbishop, Theo Nicolakis of the GOARCH Internet Ministries, has asked me to pass along the following information concerning a recent rise in parishes and parishioners being targeted by online scammers. Sadly, this has resulted in some faithful, well-meaning individuals who have been scammed out of hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars.

What follows, is a general explanation of a scam of this type, and guidelines to ensure the financial safety of all the faithful.

HOW:

Clergy and parishioners are targeted by a phishing scam where the attacker poses falsely as the priest via email or cell phone text message. These emails (and text messages) come from fake accounts that appear to an unsuspecting person as a real clergy email address, (something like **orthodoxpreist[[@](mailto:orthodoxpreist@gmail.com)]gmail.com** [notice the **typo!**] or **frpeter.stgeorgenh[[@](mailto:frpeter.stgeorgenh@gmail.com)]gmail.com**) and asks the recipient for money (usually in the form of gift cards).

This is accompanied with a sob story about a pastoral situation, for which the clergyman requires several hundred dollars in gift cards to give to someone in need. The unsuspecting parishioner/victim buys gift cards and sends photos so that the scammer can use the numbers for personal gain.

STEPS TO CONSIDER

Proactive steps your parish should take:

All parishes should consider removing email addresses from their web sites and converting parish contact to online forms. This move will prevent potential hackers from scanning parish websites for email addresses to mimic.

Talk about these security issues and scams from the pulpit. Education and communication is your primary defense.

Publish the following bulletin inserts developed by the Department of Internet Ministries on the first Sunday of every month in your parish bulletins.

<https://bulletin-inserts.s3.amazonaws.com/internet-ministries/cyber-security-bulletin-2019-10-17-bw.pdf>

<https://bulletin-inserts.s3.amazonaws.com/internet-ministries/cyber-security-bulletin-2019-10-17-color.pdf>

Sit with your parish council and design a communication plan and protocol to notify all parishioners in the event of a scam. This plan should include text messaging, email, and posting on your web site and social media channels.

Protect parishioner data! Be aware where parishioner data resides. Do not share or distribute parishioner information such as names, addresses, or telephone numbers outside of secure parish systems. If that information is sent to others and their computers are hacked, all that information is compromised!

Ensure that all computers used at the parish have active and current anti-virus and anti-malware software. It is not true that Macintosh computers are immune to viruses and do not require anti-virus. Use software from known vendors such as: Norton, Sophos, McAfee, TrendMicro, Bit Defender, etc. See: <https://www.pcmag.com/picks/the-best-antivirus-protection>

WHAT IF A PARISHIONER IS DEFRAUDED?

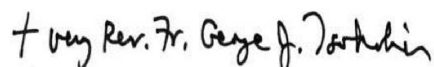
The FTC urges anyone defrauded in a gift card scam to tell the agency by visiting ReportFraud.ftc.gov. Victims should also contact law enforcement and the gift card company. The FTC lists phone numbers for major companies here: consumer.ftc.gov/articles/paying-scammers-gift-cards.

Read more about this phishing scam on our blog:

<https://blogs.goarch.org/blog/-/blogs/no-your-priest-does-not-want-you-to-buy-gift-cards-for-a-parishioner-in-need>

I am grateful for the Department of Internet Ministries' loving concern, and I hope that all our clergy and Parish leadership will do their utmost to see that these steps are followed. In this way, we can ensure that our brothers and sisters are enlightened about the need to maintain watchfulness in this era of technological connectedness. Thanking you again for your vigilance and your attention to this message,

Faithfully yours,



Very Rev. Fr. George Tsahakis
Chancellor
