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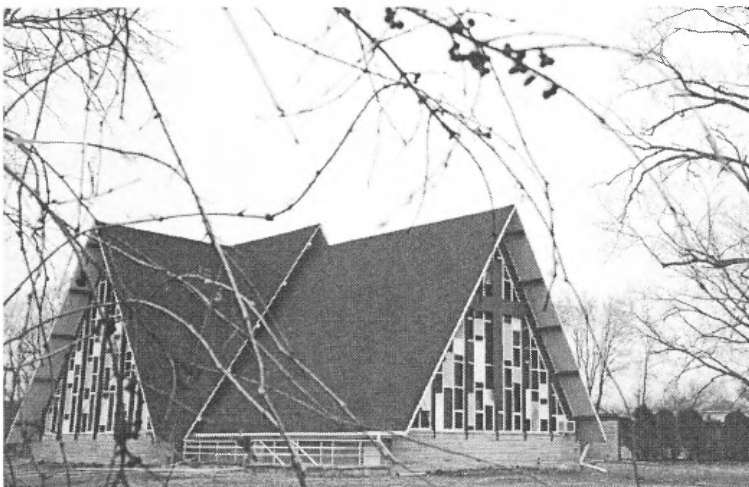
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Glenview church hit by COVID-19 is now streaming service online, as pastor remembers usher who died of disease

By ANNA KIM
PIONEER PRESS | MAR 31, 2020 | 3:49 PM



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Forty-three people who attended a March 15 service at the church, located in Glenview, **are displaying symptoms of the illness**, including LoCascio, his wife Layna LoCascio wrote in a Facebook post March 25.

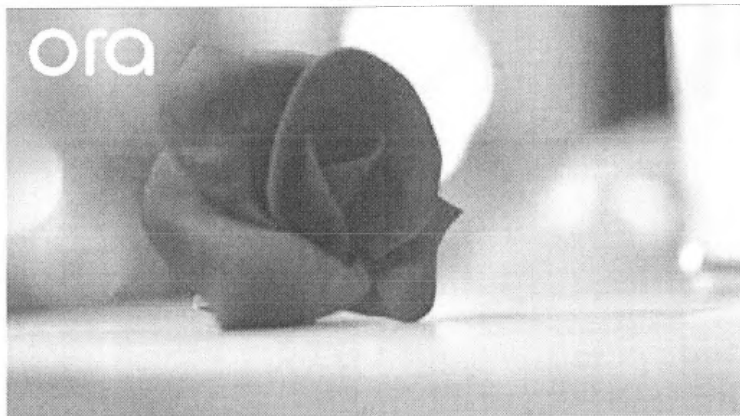
Ten members tested positive for COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, Anthony LoCascio confirmed in an email Monday to Pioneer Press.

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The last in-person Sunday service was March 15, days before the **governor's stay-at-home order**, and church leaders said about 80 people attended. Government officials had already called for large public events to be scaled down to **1,000 people and for private ones** to have a maximum 250 in attendance.

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In the service Sunday livestreamed from the LoCascio's home, the pastor said the congregation is "on the mend." He asked members who are symptomatic to continue to self-quarantine at their homes until they are free of symptoms for at least three days to prevent spreading the disease to others.

He also commemorated the church's lead usher, a man who died Friday, after he had previously tested positive for COVID-19, saying he was "promoted to his eternal reward." Several months ago, the man had been diagnosed with "inoperable stage four pancreatic cancer," Anthony LoCascio said.

“He will be missed, but he will never be forgotten,” he said. “We have shed lots of tears ... and we are lifting (the family) up.”

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Although Layna LoCascio said in her post that two other members were hospitalized, everyone is now recovering at home, Anthony LoCascio said in the email.

The church’s leadership has faced criticism for holding that last in-person service which some say seemed to have lead to the spread of COVID-19 among members. Anthony LoCascio said church leaders “were operating under the current information available at the time” and had asked sick people to stay home, wiped down surfaces and provided hand sanitizer.

“Even before service here, my phone was blowing up. Not everything was pleasant to read,” he said. “We’re infamous for deciding to have church on Sunday the 15th. And people have been feeling the need to tell me that over and over and over.”

He said he understands people are “scared” and “want to lash out,” but the outbreak in the church is “not an isolated situation.”

The pastor and his wife at times became emotional while praying and singing during the virtual service Sunday. He asked the congregation to pray and “seek the face of God” and said he is sending “love” to people criticizing the church.

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“In this hour of darkness, I know how to turn on the light,” LoCascio said through tears near the end of the service. “It’s to shut all of this negativity out and say ‘I love you, Lord.’”

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During the online service, the pastor said the church was considering an outdoor Easter service where people stay six feet apart, but said in the email Monday that the Easter service would be virtual.

In the email, Anthony LoCascio said the congregation is supporting each other.

“Like everyone right now, we are reaching for our loved ones and doing what we can to flatten the curve,” he said. “Our prayers are with those who are still recovering, for first responders and health care workers who are on the front lines providing critical care for those who are ill.”

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