



MEMORANDUM

TO: Priests of the Archdiocese

FROM: Most Rev. Salvatore J. Cordileone
Archbishop of San Francisco

DATE: July 30, 2020

RE: Reopening for public Masses, part 6

For over four months now we have been deprived of the usual way in which we Catholics keep holy the Sabbath. As a sacramental Church, it is in our nature, indeed it is our very identity, to physically gather together to worship and share in the Eucharist. I'm sure that you, just as I, are very concerned about the long-term effects this will have on our people's spiritual health.

As you might imagine, many people are giving me advice (sometimes more like orders!) about what I should do, and it is often contradictory. I detect no unified sense of how the Church should proceed in these unprecedented times. Please know, though, that I have been working very hard over these past several months to try to convince our local authorities in the City and County of San Francisco (which still allows only outdoor gatherings with a limit of 12) that we can resume in-person worship services in a safe and responsible way. I have spent countless hours in crafting communications and in telephone conversations and Zoom meetings with city officials, leading health specialists, legal experts, religious leaders and others, culminating in a Zoom meeting July 8th with (among others) Mayor London Breed, San Francisco Health Officer Dr. Tomás Aragón, and His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco (as the various Eastern Orthodox congregations in San Francisco are also eager to resume their Divine Liturgy services).

By means of this memo, then, I would like to give you a brief overview my efforts in this regard, as well as some words of encouragement and guidance along with an invitation to join me in being more personally spiritually engaged.

Review of the Situation

All throughout these conversations, I have spoken of how we want to be partners with the City in caring for our people – not just for their physical and financial health, but mental and spiritual health as well – emphasizing, too, the many different ways in which we have been supporting our local government in the effort to stem the spread of the virus and come to the aid of those in need.

With regard to local health orders in San Francisco for reopening for public activities, I have pointed out the two separate considerations of indoor and outdoor services, comparing us to similar (or even identical) secular activities.

- 1) The City had been allowing indoor retail at 50% capacity, but not allowed any indoor religious services at all. The concern here from the perspective of health experts is that in a retail store, people enter to make a purchase and then leave, without spending much time indoors; it is much riskier for a group of people to spend an extended period of time inside the same space. However, at larger retail outlets it is quite possible for people to spend an hour or more in the store, while we can keep our services to under an hour; moreover, the employees in the store are indoors continuously for many hours at a time. In addition, a church can be a much safer place than a retail store, because it is a more controlled environment: the people are stationary; we can insure social distancing; we can insure that people are wearing face coverings; we can keep the doors open to allow air flow; we can sanitize high touch areas between services.
- 2) With regard to outdoor services, you are all well aware that pre-planned and scheduled street protests have been allowed to continue unhindered, while the limit of no more than 12 people still applies to everyone else, including us. Yet here again, an outdoor worship service is a much safer event than a protest, since the people are stationary, social distance is respected, and the participants are wearing masks.

Unfortunately, despite all of these efforts and explanations, and despite hearing words of approval for our Archdiocesan safety plan that was submitted to the City's Recovery Task Force, there has been no change in the health order in San Francisco. Indeed, with counties now going on the state's watch list and health orders changing rapidly, it is sometimes difficult to keep track of it all. This is what resulted in the confusion that led to the City Attorney sending inspectors to conduct surveillance in our churches.

Pastoral Care for Our People

Thank you for the continued pastoral care you give to your people. Please continue to do so, always in keeping with the local health orders of your county.

1. I would especially ask you to do everything possible to make Mass available to your people. Given the limits on numbers that have been imposed on us, I am asking each priest (except for the elderly and those with underlying health conditions) to be willing to celebrate up to three Masses on a Sunday, as necessary to respond to the demand. People who want to attend Mass will seek it out; making more Masses available will minimize the risk that some Masses may become overcrowded with people having to be sent away. Also, continue to celebrate daily Mass, and for those parishes that have the capability, continue to livestream all Masses.

2. Please do your best to provide the other sacraments to your people as well, especially Reconciliation and Penance. The safety protocols of the Archdiocese provide for a safe way that Confessions can be kept to a regular schedule.

3. Please bear in mind that, while we are preparing for a full return to public Masses in the safest way possible, some parishes, especially in the City of San Francisco, may be under added scrutiny at this time.

4. Last but not least, please regularly remind people to follow the safety practices necessary to curb the spread of the virus. This is real, it is dangerous, and it has to be taken seriously. The resurgence is due in no small part to people becoming lax once the shelter-in-place rules began to be lifted. Please urge these practices upon them; *absolutely do not give them the impression that the coronavirus is not a serious threat to the physical health of our community*. In particular, please regularly remind your people to observe the “three W’s”:

- Wear a face covering (it’s the simplest and most effective thing one can do);
- Watch your distance (when in a group, keep six feet apart);
- Wash your hands.

Prayer and Fasting

Allow me to end on a more positive note. First of all, a truly happy one: as you know, this Saturday Deacons Ben Rosado and Ian El-Quito will be ordained priests, and so welcomed to the Presbyterate of our Archdiocese. While only a small representative group of the clergy can be present, it is a time of rejoicing for our Archdiocese, so I ask you to hold them in prayer on that day and to follow the Ordination Mass via livestream if you can. Since we cannot all be together on that day and welcome them in the usual way, please make an effort to reach out to them whenever that opportunity presents itself. Please join in prayer as well for the deacons who will be ordained on the successive Saturdays (transitional deacons on August 8th, and permanent deacons on August 15th).

Finally, it is my conviction that, with all that is going on in our society at this time, we need to redouble our efforts on the spiritual level. In particular, in addition to adoration, we have to reclaim an authentic and serious spirit of fasting. Fasting has traditionally been understood to mean no more than one meal in the course of a day. I am asking you to join me in observing Friday as a day of fast (unless your health condition cannot allow for it): please abstain from at least one meal on Fridays, and more than one if possible. Let us storm heaven with prayer and fasting for a restoration of public worship unhindered, for a swift end to this pandemic, for health care workers and researchers, and for government officials who must make very complicated decisions for the overall well-being of our communities.