



MEMORANDUM

TO: Priests of the Archdiocese

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

DATE: September 13, 2020

RE: Reopening for public Masses, part 8

My Dear Brothers,

By now you are probably aware that after months of restricting the Mass to twelve people outdoors in the City and County of San Francisco, Mayor London Breed has indicated that, effective tomorrow, she is going to ease some restrictions and in the more distant future possibly make other adjustments.

There are three problems with her public announcement that I see.

First, the Mayor announced that “houses of worship will be able to allow” 50 people at religious services outdoors starting September 14. However, the civil government has no right to dictate to the Church whether or not it may “allow” worship or not. Certainly, civil government has the authority to issue regulations to protect the public good that apply to everyone equally, including the Church. We do not dispute that. I have often given the example of building a church building: we build our churches to code, and the relevant civil authority will send an inspector to make sure that we do, as is the state’s right and responsibility; however, the state does not tell the Church how to arrange its liturgical space, for it has no authority to do so, as that applies uniquely to the Church. Similarly, the civil government can issue regulations to protect public health that apply to everyone, the worshipping community included, but those regulations have to be reasonable and consistent. They cannot be so restrictive as to effectively ban public worship. San Francisco is the most restrictive county in the entire country when it comes to public worship, but the state of California is not much better, with its limit of 100 people for an indoor worship service. This is an overreach of the government into the life of the Church and an infringement of our right to worship as protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution.

Second, the numbers are totally arbitrary: Why only 50 people outside? Why only 100 indoors? If social distancing is maintained, why is there any limit? The City, in fact, has allowed, and even participated in, street protests without any limit on number. St. Mary’s Cathedral could easily fit 1000 people either indoors or outdoors, with proper social distancing. But the Mayor tells us only that she hopes to allow indoor religious services at 25 percent capacity, up to a maximum of just 25 people (less than 1% of the total capacity of St. Mary’s Cathedral). Indoor

retail stores have a limit gauged by the ability to observe proper social distance. I have indicated in the past how our churches can be a safer indoor space than a retail store; hence, this should also be the norm for churches when reasonable and effective safety measures are observed.

Which leads me to the third and most important point: believers are being singled out for uniquely punitive treatment.

As I write to you today, in San Francisco indoor gyms are scheduled to open tomorrow. Public parks remain open without numerical limit, just with the distancing and masks. As one of my parishioners asked, "I can spend three hours indoors in Nordstrom, why can't I go to Mass indoors?" I have no good answer. Furthermore, the norms are inconsistent. Businesses requiring extended close one-on-one contact will also be open tomorrow, such as hair salons, nail salons and massage parlors, but we are allowed only one person in church at a time for prayer. This norm is doubly inconsistent in that the City still allows twelve people in a house of worship for the purpose of livestreaming a worship service. Our people, though, are still barred from our own churches for a regular, non-streamed Mass.

I think you are aware of how hard I've worked behind the scenes to partner with the City to protect our own people's health and that of our neighbors, and to demonstrate a determination to adhere to sound principles of public health. San Francisco in particular has uniquely severe restrictions on religious groups. I've presented city officials with the data showing that the Mass can be conducted safely. As three infectious disease specialists who reviewed the data of the more than one million public Masses that have taken place over the last 14 weeks put it, "The Good News: for Catholic churches following these guidelines, no outbreaks of COVID-19 have been linked to church attendance." Opening windows, sanitizing properly, closing off every other pew, socially distancing and the other protocols we developed work. And I know that you are prepared to implement those practices; indeed, those of you in San Mateo County have already done so, during the time you were conducting Mass indoors. I have done my best to make the case that the Mass is safe, and the data show that, but it has been to no avail.

So, I've made the decision that we can't be silent any longer. We cannot simply standby while our people are treated with this lack of compassion for their needs, and this lack of respect for their rights. I have therefore formed a strategy committee consisting of both chancery staff and others, both clergy and lay, to advise me on how we can best make our voice heard in a peaceful but forceful way. For the plans that are taking shape now, I will need your help with three things.

The first is to encourage your parishioners to go to the website FreeTheMass.com and sign the petition calling on the Mayor Breed to lift unfair restrictions in San Francisco. More than 3500 have done so in the first week!

Second, on next Sunday, September 20, three parishes in San Francisco are organizing three Eucharistic processions to UN Plaza by City Hall. From there, the entire group will process together up to the Cathedral and celebrate multiple Masses outdoors (with masks, and proper social distancing).

Can you organize a group of your parishioners to join us? You can either connect up with the lead parishes: St. Anthony's on Cesar Chavez, St. Patrick's on Mission and 4th Street, and Star of the Sea and St. Dominic's, which will meet at St. Dominic's parking lot. Or you can join us starting from the UN Plaza (be there, please, by 10:00 a.m.). Fr. Agudo will carry the monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament in his procession, which begins at St. Anthony's. Then when everyone arrives at the UN Plaza I will say a few words to greet the people, and then carry the monstrance in procession to the Cathedral. The procession and the Masses will be our witness to our unity of faith in the diversity of our cultures, united as one, in and for the Body of Christ. At the Cathedral we will be prepared for several outdoor Masses (some groups for Mass in English, others for Mass in Spanish) in groups of 50 people each for about 800 or more altogether. Should you have any questions, please call Fr. Piderit (cell: 347-843-2842), or Fr. Moises Agudo (his cell is 415-290-2939 and he is organizing the Hispanic procession beginning at St. Anthony in the Mission), or Fr. Eugene Tungol (his cell is 415-690-3114 and his Filipino group is organizing the walk from St. Patrick's at 4th and Mission).

We have ordered 100 banners in English, 15 in Spanish, and 5 in Chinese under the motto: "We Are Essential: Free the Mass!" Ideally you and some of your faithful can carry these banners in the procession from one of the three meeting points mentioned above or from the UN Plaza.

Since all this will happen next Sunday, we do not have much time. Banners will be distributed on Friday, and I am hopeful that sometime in the next day or two you will use Flocknote or some other effective means to inform and organize your parishioners to participate this coming Sunday.

Third, I would ask all of you, as a minimum, to hang these banners on your church as a sign that the Church is speaking out with a united voice on this, just as we did when legislation was proposed that would have required priests to break the seal of confession. Our people need to know that the Mass can be offered safely and that we want to be their advocates.

In addition to all this, another date to keep in mind is Sunday, October 3, when we will hold our annual Rosary Rally. The program is still being developed, but the general, tentative plan is to celebrate Masses on the Cathedral Plaza at 11:00 a.m., and then hold a procession and recitation of the rosary as people walk through the blocks of the neighborhood.

The time is now to show our people we care about offering them the Body and Blood of Christ, and to witness to the City that faith matters, especially to us.

Thank you for your attention to these important concerns, and for the attention you give to the people of God in your pastoral care for them.

Archbishop Cordileone's appearance on Raymond Arroyo 9/10:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qw9KUFq9fAU>

Father Moises Agudo, “Archbishop Cordileone is Right! Free the Mass!”

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/san-francisco-priest-archbishop-cordileone-is-right-free-the-mass>

“Evidence Based Data the Guidelines to Celebrate Mass Safely are Working”

https://www.realclearscience.com/articles/2020/08/19/evidence-based_guidelines_to_celebrate_mass_safely_are_working.html