

First Steps in Reopening for Public Mass
An Update to the People of God from Archbishop Cordileone
May 12, 2020

You are my shelter; you guard me from distress; with joyful shouts of deliverance you surround me (Ps 32:7).

As we continue to take shelter in our homes to help stem the spread of the coronavirus, this prayer of the psalmist reminds us that our only true refuge is the Lord alone. We ask God to shelter all those suffering from physical and economic distress as a result of this pandemic. I am also well aware of the spiritual distress that so many of our people are experiencing due to the unavailability of attending Mass in person. I therefore wish to send you this communication to update you on steps we are taking to reopen for public Mass here in the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

For these last several weeks I have been joining my brother bishops in California for our weekly videoconference meetings to discuss the current situation and strategize how to begin safely to reopen for public Masses. We all agree that we should do this in sync with government regulations for sound safety protocols, and to that end have initiated a conversation with government leaders in Sacramento on this topic. I myself have been in touch with local government leaders here, as well as consulted with top experts in the fields of health care and epidemiology. I have also been in contact with Metropolitan Gerasimos of the Greek Orthodox Church, who has shared with me the similar concerns of the bishops of the various Orthodox jurisdictions in California. The next two weeks will be the critical test: San Francisco has “flattened the curve,” and if this trend continues for these next two weeks, it will be safer to loosen some of the current restrictions on day-to-day activities.

In any event, I wish to inform you that I have formed a committee of pastors and lay people to draft safety protocols, in keeping with current government regulations, that will enable us to begin accommodating our people for public Mass. Clearly, it will be different from what we are accustomed to, since numbers will have to be limited in order to observe the required physical distance and other safety measures. However, working with this committee, I look to find a way to accommodate the greatest number of people possible for Mass while in no way compromising the safety restrictions necessary to protect our people from contracting and spreading the virus.

The dispensation to attend Sunday Mass will remain in place, and so those who fear becoming infected may remain at home in good conscience. The usual advisories also remain in place for those who should remain at home and avoid exposure to any public gathering, including worship: the elderly, those with pre-existing health conditions making them especially vulnerable to infection, those who have recently had contact with someone tested to be COVID-19 positive, etc. Sunday, of course, is still the Christian Sabbath and so must be kept holy, even if in-person attendance at Mass is not possible. You may attend any livestreamed Mass in the Archdiocese remotely via the Archdiocesan website. You will also find there an Act of Spiritual Communion and other resources (sfarch.org/keeping-the-sabbath).

God is our shelter, and God delivers from distress all those who remain true to Him. Let us therefore persevere in faith, hope and charity, trusting that in God's time and in God's way, God will surround us with joyful shouts of deliverance.

###