



COVID-19

The Reopening of our Parishes

Readiness Guide

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11

May 13, 2020



METROPOLIS OF
SAN FRANCISCO



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΦΡΑΓΚΙΣΚΟΥ

My beloved co-workers in the Lord,

Χριστός Ἀνέστη! Christ is Risen!

Though we have been isolated from one another over the past months, we have always remained connected to Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have experienced Christ in new ways and created opportunities to worship from our homes. Through various technological tools, we have been able to support one another from afar, yet still experience the closeness of our church family.

After many prayers and much patience, and in accordance with the recent Communique from the Holy Eparchial Synod of the Archdiocese, each Metropolitan has been given the responsibility to prepare for a return to our beloved churches, while abiding by state and federal guidelines. I cannot begin to express to you how saddening these past few months have been for the clergy within our Metropolis. Our hearts and souls ache due to the separation from the loving people of God with whom we pray at our Divine services. I have also heard the pain in your voices and I have read your messages, knowing that you share these feelings as you have been separated not only from one another but from the Holy Eucharist.

We rejoice that a glimmer of hope is beginning to appear, so it is incumbent on us to prepare for a transition back to parish life. As municipalities begin to lift restrictions, our parishes will soon be able to worship together once more. Depending on state regulations, only small numbers of parishioners will be allowed to attend the Divine Liturgy. Some states, unfortunately, will prohibit gathering for church services due to ongoing health concerns, so those parishes must continue worshipping from afar. My prayer is that as soon as a parish is able to resume services, it will have thoroughly prepared, with a plan already in place, and thus will be able to quickly and effectively return to worship, in compliance with local guidelines.

This *Readiness Guide* has been specifically prepared for this purpose. I encourage every parish to immediately develop a plan designed to open its doors and re-engage the congregation while being vigilant of the safety and protection of all who attend. This must be of paramount importance, for we will only restore parish life when are prepared and ready. We will also be especially be mindful of these regulations for the protection of those members of our congregations who are most vulnerable.

This will not happen overnight, so I ask for your ongoing patience and understanding. As restrictions continue to be lessened, our parishes will expand appropriately. The transition back to a fully opened parish will take time, and there may be challenges along the way, but we must persevere with faith, knowing that **“with God, all things are possible”** (Matthew 19:26b).

Amidst the joyful preparation for returning to parish life, we must not forget the souls of all those who have lost their lives to this terrible pandemic, as well as all of those who continue to suffer from its ravages. The medical workers, first responders and researchers should also be at the forefront of our prayers as they risk their lives to save others and to find a cure for this disease.

Praying that the Resurrected Christ may be your constant guide and fervent protector, I remain,

With Love in the Risen Lord,

✠Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco



PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide, which is a “working and evolving” document, contains a number of topical checklists, all intended to support a parish’s efforts to create a safe environment and an effective process for the reopening of the parish and the return to in-person communal worship and re-connection of the faithful.

It is recommended that the checklists provided be used to guide parish actions, but it is also recognized that every parish is unique. As such, sections or actions may need to be amended locally to create a full and complete plan for the parish.

Provided in a checklist format, the parish will be able to use this guide in order to:

- Assess readiness by specific areas and actions.
- Initiate plans to resolve any issues.
- Create accountability. It is recommended that in addition to selecting an overall Reopening Lead, and a separate parish “Health Officer,” each of the 5 areas noted have a “Section Lead,” ultimately responsible for the readiness within their assigned area.



5 KEY AREAS

This Guide provides focus and planning for the following areas:

- 1 Regulatory Compliance
- 2 Liturgical Practices & Worship
- 3 Health & Safety
- 4 Communications
- 5 Leaders, Greeters & Volunteers



Transitioning to Step 3



METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO PARISH SUPPORT TEAM

To help our parishes respond to the COVID-19 challenge, in late March, the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco created a 3-Step Planning Process to guide parish planning and actions. In addition, it formed the “Parish Support Team,” under the blessing and active guidance of His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos, to provide resources and materials to support the efforts and direction of our parishes.

Today, many of our parishes have “stabilized,” and while they must continue to monitor the spiritual, physical and financial wellness of the parish, they are ready now to progress into Step 3 – the limited/transitional Reopening of the Parish.



Our Reopening Progression

As we are all aware, the return to the full participation of our worship and services will be a progression. This will be governed by evidenced containment of the coronavirus within our respective counties and states and the parish's ability to demonstrate it has implemented effective safety measures and practices.

The plans and approaches within this guide are based upon the following progression model. Please note, that while the expansion of our participation from one level to the next will be determined by local and state jurisdictions, *if a parish is not confident it is ready to progress, and upon consultation with the Metropolis, it should remain at its current level until additional preparations and safeguards are implemented.*

1 **Limited Re-Gathering for Worship ~ 10 - 50 participants***

2 **Expanded Worship Participation Levels ~ 25 - 50+***

3 **Full Services Allowed**
(Currently, too early in the process to predict further details)

* Numbers will vary by state and local guidelines. Please confirm with your respective agencies for greater detail.



1. Regulatory Compliance

Section Leader: _____

All reopening, safety and operating plans of the parish must comply with regulations provided by local, state and federal agencies as well as those provided by the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco. In a recent decision, the Archdiocese of America has given approval to each Metropolitan to determine and guide the reopening of his respective parishes.

	Action	Responsibility	Completion Date
Public Health	Make initial contact with parish's local county Public Health Department to understand guidelines and gather information		
	Review reopening stages/approaches for Faith Communities from the parish's respective state and county jurisdictions		
	Review reopening stages/approaches for Faith Communities from CDC and general federal guidelines		
	Identify any contradictions which may exist between respective state and county guidelines impacting the reopening of the parish (more stringent guidelines will typically apply)		
Metropolis	Ensure parish plan is in complete compliance with all local, state and federal guidelines		
	Complete Metropolis of San Francisco Reopening Readiness Guide; completing all checklists areas		
	Sign and send "Parish Reopening Readiness Affirmation" (last page in this guide) to your respective Vicar for review.		
	Implement respective Parish Reopening Plan		



2. Liturgical Practices & Worship

Section Leader: _____

All liturgical practices and worship must comply with guidance provided by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the Metropolis of San Francisco; all social distancing and capacity restrictions must comply with local, state and federal regulations.

	Action	Responsibility	Completion Date
Social Distancing	Determine how social distancing will impact seating for services; and the overall seating capacity for the church		
	Place markings on seats and on the ground to ensure social distancing and establish a clear flow of traffic		
	Recognize that people from the same household can sit together and should not be separated		
	If attendance is restricted, develop a plan for who can enter the church (e.g., on-line reservation system; call Parish Office, etc)		
	Record the names and phone numbers of each attendee at every service, and keep in parish file, in the event that a “notice of infection” is required to be sent.		
	Train ushers on how to communicate and show empathy to those who may not be allowed to participate in services		
Liturgical Practices	Develop a plan for parishioner movement during initial seating, approaching for communion and departure/priest blessing		
	Remind parishioners Icons, the blessing cross, and other sacred vessels should be venerated without physical contact		
	Ensure Communion guidelines are clear; procedures are announced to parish; ushers trained to support Clergy		
	Limit Chanters, Acolytes, and Choir until safe and approved to do so; Adult Acolytes only; Create a plan to ensure Clergy safety		
	Present antidoron in a safe, individual manner (e.g., distributed by a single, healthy person with a gloved hand, etc.)		
	Determine if multiple Liturgies will be offered on Sundays and/or if additional weekday Liturgies will be conducted		
	Continue “live streaming” of services during Level 1 & 2 (Limited and Expanded) attendance restrictions, if logistically possible		
	Determine guidelines for all sacramentals services (e.g., weddings, etc) and communicate to the parish; post on website		



3. Health and Safety

Section Leader: _____

It is vital that, at all times, we take every effort to support the safety and well-being of those worshipping with us, our parish family, all volunteers, our staff members and Clergy.

	Action	Responsibility	Completion Date
General Facilities	Order paper masks, personal protective equipment, and extra paper towels, hand sanitizer and soap; keep stocked at all times		
	Create facility guidelines for the cleaning of all offices, classrooms, and common areas; immediately clean after use		
	Ensure restrooms are inspected and sanitized frequently during services focusing on all “high-touch” areas and items		
	Limit number of people who can enter restroom at one time; ensure proper distancing for those waiting by marking floors		
	Provide “safe-practice” guidelines to personnel assigned to clean (consider utilizing posters provided by CDC)		
	Create procedures on how to respond if parishioner, volunteer, or staff member becomes infected		
Preparing to Enter the Church	Suspend all community gatherings and fellowship/coffee hours; parishioners should leave immediately following services		
	Ask that all parishioners acknowledge one another with a simple bow – without any physical contact		
	Establish “Staging/Welcome” area in front of the Church to greet visitors, answer questions, review procedures, provide sanitizer or masks; may also wish to set up digital giving kiosk		
	Post signs enforcing Social Distancing, Personal Wellness and Safe Health Practices. Samples can be found at: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html or sanfran.goarch.org/pages/coronavirus-resource-page		
	Ensure masks are worn by all non-Clergy during all services; provide mask to anyone in need of one		
	Keep entrance door to the church open during services to prevent touching of handles or have gloved usher open		
	Ask ushers to approach parishioners who appear ill and respectfully reinforce personal wellness guidelines		
	Continue to have “paperless” worship, leaving pews empty; church bulletins should be electronically sent to parishioners		



4. Communication

Section Leader: _____

In order to increase confidence and reduce concerns of parishioners, Clergy and Parish Leaders should communicate “What to Expect” messages regularly using all forms of parish media. To-date, we have seen that situations and timelines can shift rapidly. It is recommended to begin the process of drafting communications now in order to have them ready for final editing and immediate distribution.

	Action	Responsibility	Completion Date
Key Messages	Create initial announcement focusing on “Welcome Home/What to Expect” messages and attendance guidelines		
	Emphasize that Parishioners who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 (65 years or older, have underlying medical conditions, been exposed to the virus, or are experiencing symptoms) are strongly encouraged to refrain from attending services		
	Develop messages that fully reopening the parish will occur utilizing a “phased-in” approach (Levels 1 – 3, page 5)		
	Share that many procedures and guidelines are in effect not only to protect ourselves, but to protect one another		
	Emphasize that when reopening, we must always comply with all regulatory guidelines		
	Share the steps which have been taken to create a safe environment		
Delivery	Share the procedures the parish will take to limit seating and movement within the Church		
	Utilize all parish communication channels including: Weekly Bulletin, Monthly Newsletter, Website and Parish “e-mail blasts”; post guidelines in the “Staging/Welcome” area		
	Have Clergy create a short video message covering key messages and reopening plans		
	Utilize “Live Stream” capability during priest’s comments following the Divine Liturgy to share reopening plans		
	Consider having a parish “Town Hall” to allow the priest and parish leaders to share reopening plans and answer questions		



5. Leaders, Greeters & Volunteers

Section Leader: _____

Clergy, the Parish Leaders, Staff and Volunteers must work with “one mind and one voice” as the parish is reopened. This will require a commitment to planning, discussion and responsiveness should situations arise unexpectedly.

Preparation

Engagement

Action	Responsibility	Completion Date
Identify an individual who will serve as the overall “Parish Reopening Lead,” coordinating all implementation efforts		
Identify an individual (ideally a medical or public health professional) who can serve as the parish’s “Health Officer” monitoring wellness practices and interfacing with the local Public Health Department		
Inform all Parish Leaders and Staff, prior to the reopening the parish, as to the overall plans, procedures, roles and planned communications		
Assign Ushers/Greeters to the “Staging/Welcome” area in order to welcome the faithful, ask them to sign-in, provide a visual monitoring of their health, provide direction and answer any questions. Prepare to also welcome inquirers.		
Ensure all Ushers/Greeters wear masks at all times and gloves, as needed		
Refrain from any physical touching (handshaking, hugging, etc.) upon greeting and maintain proper physical distancing		
Encourage digital giving; those handling any money should use caution and wash hands before and after		
Ensure all Volunteers, Ushers/Greeters and Staff are trained to recognize the symptoms of COVID-19 and direct those exhibiting signs to return home or seek medical assistance		



Quick Reference

The Parish “Reopening Plan” is guided by key actions and activities which, when coordinated as a single plan, will create a safe environment encouraging the re-engagement of our parishioners.

For quick reference, following are the key elements associated with our parish plan:

- ❖ Pray.
- ❖ Comply with requirements and guidelines of all local, state and federal agencies, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco.
- ❖ Appoint a “Parish Reopening Leader,” a “Parish Health Officer,” and “Plan Segment Leaders” to guide the plan.
- ❖ Ensure for the well-being and safety of our Clergy and Liturgical personnel.
- ❖ Establish social distancing in all areas along with an effective Church seating and movement plan.
- ❖ “Paperless” Worship.
- ❖ Establish “Staging/Welcome” areas containing masks and hand sanitizer, which must be used by all prior to entering the Church.
- ❖ Expand the number of Divine Liturgies and create an effective reservation – based system to comply with established attendance guidelines.
- ❖ Commit that the Church will be disinfected before and following services and that all restrooms will be disinfected on a regular and frequent basis.
- ❖ Provide “What to Expect” communication to the faithful of the Parish by e-mail, letter, website or other means in advance of the scheduled re-opening.
- ❖ Post signs to remind all of requirements and information.
- ❖ Train Clergy, Church Leaders, Staff and Volunteers on identifying those who may be ill with the virus, what to do and how to create a safe and clean environment.
- ❖ Continue to Live – Stream services.
- ❖ No live gatherings in excess of approved limits.
- ❖ Utilize resource materials and “best practices” of the Metropolis of San Francisco.
- ❖ Recognize the role of our Vicars throughout this journey, as they provide local coordination amongst the parishes of their Vicariate and lend support and guidance to fellow Clergy and parish leaders.



Parish Reopening Readiness Affirmation

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11

PARISH:

DATE:

CITY & STATE:

PARISH REOPENING LEAD:

PARISH HEALTH OFFICER:

By our signatures below, we affirm that our parish has developed a comprehensive "Reopening Plan" which will guide the activities and actions of our parish and is, of this date, prepared to support the return and re-engagement of our parishioners.

Signatures

Proistamenos

Parish Council President

Vicar

Once signed, please send to the Metropolis of San Francisco, Acting Chancellor,
V. Rev. John Constantine at frjohn.sanfran@gmail.com