



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΦΡΑΓΚΙΣΚΟΥ

May 23, 2020

✠Michael the Confessor, Bishop of Synnada

My beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Χριστὸς 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 physical 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 especially 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 are beginning to lift restrictions, our parishes will soon be able to worship together once more. Depending on state regulations, attendance at the Divine Liturgy will be restricted. Some localities, unfortunately, will continue to prohibit gatherings of more than a handful 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 been thoroughly prepared, with a plan ready in place, and thus will be able to quickly and effectively return to worship, in compliance with local guidelines.

Our Metropolis has prepared a detailed [Readiness Guide](#) that each parish must follow. This is being done both for the protection of the parish and also for the faithful. While the Church surroundings will be familiar, our behavior during worship and our interaction with others will be different.

How is the Metropolis Preparing for Our Return?

- The Metropolis Clergy and Parish Council leadership have met several times to discuss the necessary steps to safely reopen our churches.
- Each parish is following stringent protocols for preparation. This includes direct contact with local authorities, adherence to directives from the CDC, and full compliance with the Metropolis [Readiness Guide](#) for the Reopening of our parishes.

- Once the required preparations are complete, each parish must submit a signed document affirming their compliance which will be submitted to their respective Vicar for final approval to open the parish for services.
- Parishes will continue to accommodate those who are unable to attend church through the continuation of live-streamed services.

How Should I Prepare?

- Be patient! We want you to return, but we want it to be accomplished in a safe and organized manner.
- Those who have pre-existing health conditions and those who are over 65 are requested not to attend services.
- If you are exhibiting any signs of illness, even symptoms not related to COVID-19, we ask that, for your own safety and those around you, please do not attend services.
- If you do not have a mask, please obtain one. This will be necessary for you to wear when inside the church. If you arrive without one, the parish will provide one.
- Please bring hand sanitizer with you. There will also be hand sanitizer available in the Narthex to use upon your arrival to church.

What Should I Expect When I Come to Church?

- Attendance will be limited, based on the seating capacity of the church, per the guidelines of local authorities.
- Each parish will determine an appropriate sign-up procedure to strictly adhere to attendance guidelines.
- Only the main doors of the church will be open. Side doors and back entrances will be closed so that attendance and safety practices are carefully followed.
- Masks are to be worn by parishioners during church services. Parental supervision is required for children over the age of 3 who are wearing masks. Children under the age of 2 are exempt from wearing masks.
- Your attendance will be recorded, including your current phone number, so that should contact tracing be necessary, the parish will have a clear record of who was present for each service.
- You may venerate icons by bowing, but kissing or touching are prohibited.
- Parish bulletins will only be distributed electronically.

What Should I Expect When I am in Church?

- Please understand that due to occupancy limitations and social distancing, seating will be clearly marked and carefully monitored.
- An usher will direct you to a seat in the church. Most likely, this will not be the pew where you usually sit. Please do not move to a different seat.
- There will be specific directions and floor markings for safely entering and exiting the church to maintain social distancing.
- Up to two adult altar servers may assist the priest. No altar servers under the age of 18 are permitted.
- Choirs may not resume at the present time. A single chanter may lead the hymns and responses, and a second chanter is also permitted provided they stand on opposite sides of the Solea. All chanters must be over the age of 18.
- Families who live together will be seated together. Relatives who do not reside in your immediate household will be seated separately.

- Liturgical books are not permitted in the pews. Online resources are available for you to follow the services.
- Please follow the markings for proper spacing to approach for Holy Communion.
- Antidoron will be distributed at the end of the Liturgy by the priest, following strict protocols.
- Please refrain from kissing the hand of the priest.
- When the service has concluded, please promptly follow the directional signage to exit the church safely.
- Parishioners are kindly requested not to linger on the church property. No social gatherings or coffee fellowship are permitted.
- After each service, the church will be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized.
- Parish priests, in consultation with their lay leadership, will endeavor to offer additional Divine Services to accommodate parishioners.

This information and more are included in [Readiness Guide](#) that the Metropolis has prepared for the benefit of our parishes and faithful. Every parish is presently working through the Guide to re-engage our congregations while being vigilant for the safety and protection of all. This must be of paramount importance. We will only restore parish life when the parish is prepared and ready. We will also be especially mindful of these regulations for the protection of those members of our congregations who are most vulnerable.

This will not happen overnight. I ask for your ongoing patience and understanding. As restrictions continue to be lessened, parish life 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