



Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles

Prot. 48/01/20

May 6, 2020

My Dear Monsignors and Fathers,

Greetings and Peace!

During these difficult times my concerns and prayers have been for the overall wellbeing and safety of our faithful and for you. It was nice meeting with you over Zoom last week. I want to commend you for your dedication and your creative ways to minister to our people during this lockdown. I also hope that you have been able to keep in touch with your parishioners in various ways and help them understand that they have not been abandoned or forgotten.

I realize that all of us are eager to return to some form of normal liturgical and sacramental life in our parishes. Due to the continuing pandemic we will need to phase in our return to normal parish life. While the health and safety of everyone is utmost in my mind, I would like to outline some guidelines for all of our parishes to follow regarding services and sacraments.

General Norms

1. Your well-being and safety are my top priorities as well as the health of all of our people.
2. Since our parishes span across the United States, each parish must follow the local civil government ordinances and guidelines regarding the reopening of Churches, observe social distancing guidelines, hygiene requirements, gathering limits, shelter in place ordinances, and other recommended or required expectations.
3. Our parishes should consider the general guidance of the Latin (arch) diocese about the issues I raised above since they have more detailed and specific information and access to local health officials.

Religious Services Guidelines and Recommendations

1. For the faithful, a dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Divine Liturgy will continue during the month of May.
2. Once your parish is allowed to open for public worship, those with compromised immune systems, the elderly, and the ill should be encouraged to stay home.
3. Follow local recommendations regarding the maximum allowed number to gather whether based on a number (e.g., 50) or on your church capacity (e.g., 25%, 50% etc.). You may have to adjust your normal hours for services. You may also need to have extra Masses, and even encourage them to attend a weekday service.
4. All members of the congregation should be encouraged to wear face masks. You should be prepared to provide them with masks if they do not have them.
5. Place hand sanitizer near Church entrances and encourage members of the congregation to perform proper hand hygiene while entering and exiting the Church.

6. Your ushers should encourage the congregation to maintain the normal social distancing.
7. Churches will need to be sanitized thoroughly before and after each service to ensure proper hygiene.
8. Church Halls or other spaces normally used for coffee or after-liturgy gatherings should be discouraged.

Distribution of Communion Guidelines

I recommend to you the following:

- Faithful should be given the option of receiving in the hand or on the tongue. Care should be taken in both instances. The priest and deacons should use sanitizer prior to the distribution of the Eucharist and afterwards.
- The faithful should not participate in the transfer of the offerings which may be placed on the altar, even on Sundays.
- Communion may not be distributed with gloves nor may the faithful receive communion with gloves.

Confession Guidelines

- Once restrictions are lifted, you need to make sure that social distancing is maintained between the priest and the penitent.
- “Drive through” confessions may also be a possibility as long as penitents remain in their cars with the windows open, wearing masks, and social distancing is followed.

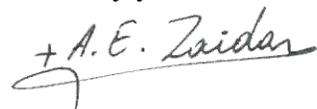
I encourage you to inform and remind the faithful that even with all the proper precautions and adherences to social distancing, there is still a risk for those who attend public services. While we can do everything to sanitize and clean our Churches and spaces, they should expect the same potential exposure as any other public space.

My dear brothers, while I hope these guidelines offer some answers, there is still a lot to be done and challenges that may arise as we move forward. I know that each parish is different as each part of our country has been affected differently, but we must do all that we can to protect our people as best we can.

I thank you for your service and ministry, and, like you, I look forward to when we can all return to a more normal liturgical and sacramental life.

With my best wishes and prayers for your health, well-being, and safety, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,



+A. Elias Zaidan

Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles