

## His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco - The Challenges of Re-Opening Our Parishes



My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

***“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.” I Corinthians 16:13***

Week after week as we monitored the progress of our parishes re-opening for worship, even on a limited basis, my heart was filled with joy that these small steps were leading us on a gradual path towards the restoration of parish life. With 67 churches in our Metropolis, it has been a challenge to monitor the ups and downs of each municipality as the tracking of the COVID-19 pandemic would influence which parishes could open their doors for Divine Services.

Two weeks ago, nearly 80% of our parishes were open to some extent. As the virus would surge in certain areas, there were new mandates that forced the closure of many parishes, relegating several of them to revert back to online services only, or requiring outdoor services with limited seating. I know this has brought great

disappointment to many of our clergy and faithful. I also recognize there are still communities in certain parts of our Metropolis that are anxiously awaiting the doors of their parishes to open after four months of virtual worship.

Please know that I would like nothing more than our churches to be full, but at the present time, this is not possible. But that does not mean our faith should be diminished. Our faith is not just confined to the wall of our parishes. Rather, it is something that fills your heart and soul, and permeates every aspect of your life. Your faith in God and your belief in Him should guide your every step each and every day. I am grateful for your patience and understanding, and I continue to pray daily for the safekeeping of you and your loved ones.

During these challenging times, I have also had the opportunity to communicate with my fellow Pan-Orthodox hierarchs on numerous occasions. Because of our shared love and concern for the flocks entrusted to our care, we communicated directly with San Francisco Mayor London Breed and County Health Officer Dr. Tomás Aragón. The ongoing restrictions in the bay area motivated us to raise our collective voices, so we sent a letter requesting consideration for the need to prioritize the reopening of churches for in-person worship. This also led to a lengthy video conference with Mayor Breed along with Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco. The Mayor was sympathetic to our plea, but within a short time following our meeting, California Governor Gavin Newsom closed many of our counties for indoor worship services due to the rise in COVID-19 cases.

The COVID-19 Support Team that was formed by the Metropolis over three months ago continues to meet weekly for the development of resources and to serve as a guide for the ongoing challenges of re-opening our parishes. We also continue to share important information with our clergy and parish leadership to assist with financial management, stewardship and fundraising, not to mention our ongoing expanded ministries which have smoothly transitioned to online programs.

As these continue to be tenuous times with the uncertainty of the trajectory of the pandemic, please continue to beseech the Lord's blessings upon all those who are caring for the ill, those on the front lines, and all those who are diligently researching to find a cure for this virus. We owe these dedicated workers our sincere thanks for all they are doing for our protection.

I pray that someday soon I may share with you that our all parishes are open. While that would be a joyous occasion, we already have heard the most joyful news of all, that Jesus Christ humbled himself to come down to earth, to preach the Gospel of

love, to be handed over to death on the Cross, and to rise on the Third Day so that we might have eternal life in Him.

Stay healthy. Stay strong. Stay faithful. God is with you always!

With Love in Christ,

**+ G E R A S I M O S**

Metropolitan of San Francisco

**Download:** [\*Orthodox Bishops Letter to City of San Francisco\*](#)

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