



Embracing God's People • Equipping Disciples • Accompanying Believers

June 10, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last Saturday in my letter to you, I confessed a little giddiness. Now I have to confess that as I write I have crossed into full-on delight and expectation. On Monday afternoon I received word from the office of Bishop Alex Aclan that our plans for the reopening of our Church building for public mass have been approved. Part of that process also involved putting extensive protocols in place for the reopening of our parish office and this will be happening in phases as we move forward.

The immediate news at this time is that **Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Northridge will begin celebrating Sunday mass publicly once again on this coming Sunday, June 14th**. It is fitting that we celebrate our first public masses on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, or *Corpus Christi*, as it was traditionally called. **(Plans for weekday mass are still forthcoming)**

Once again, it is fitting that I express my gratitude publicly to the group of parishioners who assisted in the review and editing of the plan which seeks to uphold the health and well-being of our community, even as we navigate compliance with Archdiocesan and Public Health Department guidance. As we move forward, these protocols and procedures will be adapted to ensure we are doing all we can in terms of “best practices” appropriate to our current times. Copies of the initial plan and protocols will be posted on our website soon, and may also be viewed at the Parish Office.

### **Initial Steps Moving Forward**

I appreciate that there are many mixed feelings about our reopening. Some people can't wait to attend mass in our Church, and others are very nervous about coming together with a crowd of people. And there are likely lots of people somewhere in-between. I want to assure everyone that from our end, here at the parish, we've been working deliberately to ensure that everything we can do we are doing in terms of providing for public worship again.

There are a few things that are going to be important going forward.

First of all, the **dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday mass** continues. Archbishop Gomez has as a priority the health and well-being of our parishioners, and is particularly sensitive to those who are considered part of the population that is at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. We're all pretty familiar with that at this stage... over 65, people living in nursing homes or long-term care facilities, those

with underlying health conditions, etc. Everyone is encouraged to take **personal responsibility** for their own health and the choices made in this regard. I just encourage everyone in the higher-risk group to read the related [CDC recommendation](#) before coming to worship with us in person. If there is any doubt in your mind, please don't hesitate to join us in worship via the ZOOM link.

Moving forward, one of the important things will be making provision for “**contact tracing**” in the event that there is an outbreak of COVID-19 and we need to notify people who are present at a parish event. To that end, we will be using a service to “pre-register” for attending mass in person. This will also help us to manage our numbers, given that we are limited in the number of people (100) who can physically be present in our Church building at any one time.

To pre-register just go to the [parish website](#), click on the [link](#), and provide the required information. We will be using “Faith Direct” to assist us with this process. Those who are already using the eGiving service provided by Faith Direct will be familiar with the layout and may find it a little easier to navigate.

**Pre-registration** will be important and will save a lot of time on-site as we begin this process of entering into public worship once again. When you arrive at church you will be asked to assist staff and volunteers who will

- Verify you're wearing a mask/face-covering
- Verify the contact information you've already provided,
- Verify with you that you've been symptom-free for COVID-19 for at least two weeks
- Assist you with hand-sanitizer

On entering the Church building, everyone will be escorted from the narthex to a pew in the main body of the church, where we will be asked to remain for the duration of the mass. **Mass will continue to be broadcast using the ZOOM platform**, and everything will be taking place at the altar. The liturgies will be necessarily minimal, with no congregational singing, no missalettes in the pews, etc., Holy Communion will be offered to those present after the final blessing, in order to facilitate the easiest movement of everyone and to avoid any unnecessary back-tracking that would lead to momentary congestion in the aisles. After mass has concluded, everyone will immediately leave the Church in order that the space can be cleaned and sanitized in preparation for the next mass.

To help those who are coming to the parish church on Sunday, there is a video on our website showing what to expect when you arrive at the parish church on Sunday morning.

Physically speaking, it was relatively easy to close the Church building. Re-opening and preparing it for worship again is far more complicated than even I could have imagined. Doing this with the additional challenges for sanitizing the space and for ensuring the LA County Public Health protocols are observed has been an eye-opening experience.

The air-conditioning system has been cleaned and serviced. The interior of the building has been given a deep-cleaning over a number of days. Volunteers are being specifically trained to assist in these protocols.

The church interior has been sanitized and disinfected. And all of this will be an ongoing reality for the foreseeable future.

While these measures might seem cumbersome to some, or overkill to others, I am resolved to do whatever we can possibly do to adhere to the protocols developed in order to keep the members of our community safe as they begin to engage once more in public celebration of the mass.

Protocols for celebrating the **Sacrament of Confession/Reconciliation** have also been developed, and may be read on our parish website. We will have confessions available again beginning on Saturday afternoon. If you are waiting to avail of this opportunity, please make sure to read the protocols we have developed ahead of time. We will be adding confession times going forward, but this will get us started.

As we go forward, we will be developing additional protocols for other communal church celebrations such as funerals, weddings, baptisms, etc. All our protocols will adhere to best practices and current guidance received from appropriate authorities, both civil and church. It is important to note that by their nature, these protocols will be fluid. Our most current information will always be made available on our website.

As we take these initial steps and begin to enter upon public worship once again, and the gradual restoration of our sacramental life, I continue to hold you all in prayer before God, giving thanks for the gift of your faith and the life of discipleship to which you witness.

God bless and keep you all in His love and peace. I look forward to greeting you in person in the days, weeks and months ahead.

*Fr. David*