



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

March 19, 2020

Prot. 25/01/20

Beloved Priests, Deacons, Subdeacons, Brothers, Sisters and all the Faithful,

As the COVID-19 situation continues to change on an almost daily basis, I have attempted to authorize responses commensurate to the developing conditions. Since we now see schools, business and other private and public institutions canceling activities, ceasing normal operations and enforcing social distancing guidelines, **I am now closing all of our Maronite parishes, institutions and programs in the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles effective immediately and until further notice.** However, it is my intention to review this decision following consultation with the Presbyteral Council scheduled for March 30 and 31, 2020. This decision to close, includes, but is not limited to, all weekend and daily public religious services (Divine Liturgies, Lenten Friday services), educational programs and all social gatherings using parish facilities or sponsored by the parish or any of its organizations. I do not make this decision lightly nor should anyone understand it to be an abandonment of our duties or concern for our people. While my decision lifts the obligation of the faithful to attend the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, it does not eliminate our obligation to pray and spend time with the Lord. We are obliged to pray daily wherever we may be.

As your Bishop, I have been given the gift of fatherhood and I am, thus, charged to care for all of you. While my spiritual responsibilities are paramount, I also have an obligation to care for and protect to the best of my ability, your physical well-being. This obliges me to make this exceptional decision.

Funerals, baptisms, and weddings may be celebrated with immediate family members only in attendance and within the guidelines of your local civil governmental health agency as to the number allowed for public gatherings. I am asking all pastors to provide for live-streaming of privately celebrated religious services, to provide specified times that the church may be open for private prayer, confessions and for reception of the Eucharist (the Body of Christ only and administered in the hand). These times will be limited and established at the parish level. I am aware that the local Latin dioceses may have adopted different procedures or practices or offered different options, but what I have authorized in this letter is what I expect that our Maronite parishes adhere to.

During this time I ask the clergy of the Eparchy to continue to minister to your spiritual needs as circumstances permit and within the guidelines I have outlined.

As Christians, we do not belong to the world, because we belong to the Lord; however, we are also very aware that we are in the world. As such we must do what is within our power to be concerned for the well-being of our families, our neighbors and our communities. We must pray and extend a helping hand to others within our ability to do so.

Parishes will post this and other information as deemed appropriate by the pastor. I ask that you also keep yourselves informed of developments regarding the situation.

On this Feast of Saint Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, and through his intercession, may our loving God, the Divine Physician, cure all the sick and speed up the end of this pandemic.

Please be assured of my prayers for you and your loved ones. Let us continue praying for each other.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. E. Zaidan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross-like mark at the beginning.

+A. Elias Zaidan

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