

To the Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy of the Diocese of the West:

As you may expect, the situation concerning the Coronavirus is very fluid and the civil authorities are doing their best to limit its spreading among us. And we too, out of concern for the well being of our flock in every place, are sadly called upon to cooperate with them, even to the extent of closing our temples for a period of time.

At this time, the civil authorities in the Bay Area have called upon us to close our places of worship for the next two weeks in an attempt to slow down the progression of the disease. And I, with profound regret, have asked the clergy of the area to close their temples for the time being. Others of you live in areas where the authorities have asked that gatherings be limited to 25 or less persons. While this may seem to be a better solution, I ask you: "Who is to be among the chosen and by what criteria are they to be selected? Should you open your church for services, what do you tell the person who shows up and cannot be admitted?" For these reasons, I am asking all the clergy to close their temples for the next two weeks at least. I ask you not to serve the Liturgy even for your families or to hold any public worship. It is my hope and prayer that, by doing this, we may be able to salvage some of the Paschal joy later next month. Consequently, you should consume the Holy Gifts prepared for the Presanctified Liturgy.

So that your faithful may still be spiritually nourished, you have a blessing to broadcast via the internet sermons, read the appointed scriptures and whatever prayers, akathists and molebins you feel appropriate.

I would like to close with a quotation from a letter written by His Grace, Bishop Alexis of Bethesda:

"Honour a physician with the honour due unto him for the uses which ye may have of him: for the Lord hath created him."

—Sirach 38:1

We are at present speaking about temporary measures for two weeks. People have vacations for longer periods of time. Not so long ago, people would commune once a year. I fail to see how two weeks of closed churches is

something too much for people to bear, especially for people who love their neighbor as themselves.

If one life, if one parishioner, is saved because of stricter measures, shouldn't we all have enough love to sacrifice even our own spiritual needs for that soul for two weeks?

It is unthinkable that the servants of our Lord Who healed "all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" could be less prudent regarding the physical well-being and health of those in their charge than the civil authorities.

If you have any questions or concerns, I am available by phone. Please know this policy will be reviewed in two weeks time.

Asking God's blessing and protection for you and your flocks, I am,  
+Benjamin"