No. 36 /2020

Blessings to our Very Reverend Chor Episcopoi, Reverend Fathers, Reverend Deacons, and faithful of the Diocese of South-West America!

Dearly beloved,

The whole world is passing through a dark valley of death due to the uncontroled (?) COVID-19 pandemic irrespective of cast, creed, or any geographical differences. It is more painful to notice that even in the midst of this terrible situation of life threatening pandemic, humanity is fighting each other for various reasons such as racism, border attack between neighbouring countries, inhuman brutal atrocities against women and children and other deadly and satanic activities against the abundant life promised by our Lord. This has affected each of us in different ways, such as our inability to be present with our beloved ones who are victims of some of these clutches; sometimes it is more painful when we could not even visit and pay homages to our beloved ones in the family due to many restrictions; in this situation the grief of a loved one’s passing away is beyond our control. We offer our prayers and condolences to all those who are grieving during this difficult time.

It is reported that as the days and weeks pass, the attack of Covid 19 is getting worse in Texas and Florida and the number of people tested positive with COVID-19 are increasing. Although the local authorities have given permission to reopen our churches and conduct services with a set of strict rules and protocol, it is imperative we take necessary precautions responsibly. As our Diocese spans several states, with parishes varying in size, we cannot give one set of directions for everyone to follow. Hence, all parishes must strictly abide by directives of the governments. We appreciate the selfless pastoral care and spiritual nurturing offered by our clergy through their continues effort using technological support. Also, we appreciate the lay leaders in our parishes, who have been creative in ensuring the faithful remain connected to the Orthodox faith and life. Regarding the communion of Holy Qurbana, in consultation with His Holiness Bava Thirumeni, we exhort you to follow a uniform method: serve the Holy Qurbana from the peelasa using separate steel spoon for each communicant and put it in boiled water after use; properly sanitize all spoons after the Service by the priest himself. Clergy must take extra measures to dispose the water in the most meticulous manner

Following list of precautions (sugugusted by His Grace Zachariah Mar Nicholovos Thirumeni) have to be taken into seriously in our parishes to ensure we all remain safe and healthy.
Some Guidelines

- Anyone carrying symptoms of the coronavirus, COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell) must seek medical attention, and remain at home.

- All who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 must to refrain from attending church.

- Churches must be cleaned and sanitized meticulously in accordance with CDC guidelines, especially objects that are routinely touched, such as door handles, furniture, Qurbanakramams, Bibles, liturgical articles, microphones, etc.

- Churches must have hand sanitizers readily available at entrances, outside elevators, and other points of access.

- It is advisable before entering the church, the temperature of each person under their supervision should be taken by a designated person. If the person’s temperature is above 100.4F they are to return to their home, for their safety and the safety of others.

- Hands must be sanitized by worshippers upon entering and exiting the church.

- Faithful must limit their movement in church, while maintaining appropriate social distancing measures during and after services (six feet apart from each other).

- It is permissible to refrain from offering the Kiss of Peace during the Divine Liturgy, and Kaimuthu during Holy Qurbana and afterwards, as deemed appropriate by the Vicar/Assistant Vicar.

- It is encouraged not to socialize in the parish hall or other areas of the church or its surrounding buildings or parking lots. Additionally, Sunday Fellowship should continue to be suspended until further notice.

- All non-liturgical in person activities in our parishes are suspended until further notice. This includes, but is not limited to ministries in our parishes. Parishes may conduct Bible Studies over video, until in-person events can be resumed.

- Parish Committees and other such administrative meetings should continue to meet as normally scheduled, but be conducted through conference calls or video conferencing.

We uphold you all in our humble prayers and reaffirm our love and concern for our clergy, their families, and all of our faithful of our diocese. We also wish that everyone will be in good faith, hope and love; and empowered by the Spirit of God.

May the Love of God the Father, Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and th Fellowship and Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all for ever.

Camp:
Sreyas Aramana, Adoor, Pathanamthitta Dt.
June 24, 2020

Metropolitan Dr. Zacharias Mar Aprem