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 THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST:
 DIOCESES OF WESTERN USA, CALIFORNIA AND EASTERN USA



ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR ALL THE PARISHES OF THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST IN THE UNITED STATES

*Beloved Clergy and Faithful of the Assyrian Church of the East, in the United States:
 Grace, Peace and Blessings in Christ Jesus the Lord!*

We address you, our beloved in Christ Jesus, in fidelity to our archpastoral ministry as the bishops of the three dioceses of the Assyrian Church of the East in the United States—Western USA, California, and Eastern USA—in response to the concern over the present pandemic which is quickly spreading throughout our country, namely the novel coronavirus COVID-19.

The past few weeks has been a time of trial and suffering not only for our faithful, but for all the citizens of the United States—and indeed across the whole world. We all find ourselves in the midst of a viral infection that even our medical professionals are struggling to deal with and to contain, in any way possible. We believe that this trial is not merely one of a medical proportion, simply put. Rather, it is a time when the Lord is allowing our faith to be ‘tried as by fire’ in order to refine us and strengthen our love for Him, amidst the uncertainties that are enveloping us all. For, we know that every illness and infirmity is a result of our fallen and sinful human nature.

We all have come to realize that the holy and Great Fast (*Soma Rabba*) this year is very different, and we are being called to a deeper and more renewed faith—it is something special. We are not only fasting in repentance for our own sins, a living example of which we see in our ancient forefathers the Ninevites, who fasted in repentance and were delivered by God. Rather, we are also fasting that the Lord might absolve and forgive the sins of humanity as a whole. Not only are we fasting for our own spiritual benefit, but now is the time to make our fast a ‘global’ one, by remembering the sick and the

elderly, the vulnerable and the young, who are most susceptible to the present pestilence which God is allowing us to undergo—in His infinite wisdom.

We are conscious of the many grave concerns of a pastoral nature which our faithful have, as well as unanswered questions, which therefore falls upon us to address to remedy in an ecclesiastical nature, but yet being informed by the exhortations of our local and national health agencies. Therefore, we are issuing this joint pastoral letter with liturgical prescriptions that will be in effect for all the parishes of the Assyrian Church of the East across the United States.

After much prayer, reflection and thoughtful consultation and discussion, the following liturgical directives are being issued as of the date of this circular letter to all of our faithful in the United States:

1. The Bishops of the Assyrian Church of the East are concerned for the spiritual welfare of our faithful, and urge them to remain faithful to Christ, and to hope and trust in His majesty and care for His flock, the holy Church, and for His mercy upon all mankind in this present global pandemic;
2. As Shepherds of the flock of Christ, we ask our beloved faithful to increase their prayers and supplication before the Lord, during this holy season of fasting, that God might have mercy on all of us and banish the fears and uncertainties that are accompanying this illness. Let us especially seek the prayers and intercession of the holy Saints of God, as models of Christian living and faith to be emulated;
3. **Liturgical prescriptions:** the celebration of the Holy Qurbana, the most sacred Sacrament of the Eucharist of the Lord's Body and Blood, will be continue to be celebrated for Wednesday, March 19th (Mid-Lent/Pallo) and Sunday, March 22nd in all the parishes where the local governmental agencies have not proscribed large gatherings. However, the Eucharist will be observed in the following manner for these two dates indicated: 1) the Holy Qurbana will be celebrated **only by a limited number of priests and deacons, without the presence of the faithful (i.e. behind closed doors), and a time allowance will be announced for each parish in which the faithful can come in the church (without staying) and receive the Eucharist from the celebrant. Due to national guidelines issued by the president, no more than 10 people will be allowed in the church at one time during the reception of Communion.** We ask the ushers and the parish committee to be vigilant in helping this flow of restricted amount of persons.
4. For the two dates of the celebration noted above (#3), the direct participation from the Communion Chalice will be strictly relegated to the priests and deacons alone, and not to the faithful. The usual fasting restrictions still apply before the reception of Holy Communion.
5. There will be no congregating in the parish hall, church foyer or any other premises of the church during the Eucharistic liturgy, and at the reception of Holy Communion.
6. We especially express our solace for the elderly, chronically ill and the young, who are sick at this time with the corona virus, and those who are most vulnerable to contract it. Thus, we strongly urge all those who are sick with the flu or any other chronic illness, the elderly, and small children to stay at home during these next few weeks.

7. Further prescriptions will be given in the very near future for the following Sundays, March 29, Palm Sunday (April 5) and the Feast of the Resurrection (April 12), as we are monitoring the situation closely.
8. **Regarding funerals:** a funeral in any given parish is to be conducted by only a few clergy in an abbreviated format, with only the immediate family members present. No funeral luncheons may be held on any church premises at any time. We also highly discourage any condolence gatherings at the home of the deceased, except for the immediate family.
9. Should any parishioner have a given pastoral need or emergency, please contact your local parish priest that arrangements might be made to meet your spiritual needs. These include the anointing of the sick and those who are near death. However, baptisms and weddings will be postponed for after Easter (pending the situation);
10. Should one of the parishioners have an urgent need (food, household, items), and is either elderly or bed-ridden, please inform your local parish;
11. We ask that each parishioner makes himself/herself aware with the recommendations and restrictions of their local governmental health agency.

We would like to say a final word, and ask that all of us continue to believe with great faith and to trust in the Lord, and in His abundant mercies towards. Our Lord Jesus Christ promised: "Ask, and it shall be given to you" (St. Matthew 7:7); let us ask with faith. Furthermore, let us pray and fast as one body, seeking the Lord's favor at this time, for again the Lord promises us: "Fear not, little flock!" (St. Luke 12:32). By God's grace let us dispel every fear and panic from us, and surrender our hearts to the Lord that He might heal them, and strengthen us at this trying time.

In closing, our prayers are extended to all of the physicians, nurses and medical professions who have the task of physically caring for the infirm, particularly those who have contracted the virus. May the Lord strengthen them and keep them from all harm.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all; Amen+++

Issued on this 17th day of March, in the year of Our Lord 2020:-

✠Aprim Khamis
Bishop of Western USA



✠Awa Royel
Bishop of California



✠Paulus Benjamin
Bishop of Eastern USA

