



May 29, 2020

Dear Clergy/Imam/Rabbi/Guru/Faith Leader,

As you may be aware, the State of California loosened its restrictions on religious gatherings and to be in alignment with the State, I have also loosened these restrictions in San Mateo County effective 6/1/20.

I want to approach this subject with the deep respect it deserves. I have a heartfelt belief that a spiritual practice is a cornerstone for healthy human development. I want you and your congregants to be aware, that allowing religious gatherings isn't being done because I believe it's safe. In fact, I don't think it is safe or wise to have gatherings of any size right now. It is especially unsafe for people over the age of 50 and folks who have chronic medical conditions to gather. Gathering increases their risk of contracting the virus and becoming very sick or dying. I do not think it is a good idea, even with protections in place, to have gatherings of people who do not belong to a single household. I do not recommend you proceed with these types of gatherings at this time. I particularly recommend that people over the age of 50 and folks who have chronic medical conditions not be allowed to attend these types of gatherings.

There have been numerous reports of virus transmission in church/mosque/synagogue/temples/houses of worship settings. Singing, a mainstay of many religious services, while very comforting and healing, is about the best way you could think of to spread the virus far and wide and infect many. Chanting and recitation should also be avoided.

I do understand that having these gatherings, in the framework allowed by the order, is your and your congregation's choice. If you do decide to have these gatherings, in order to reduce your possible liability, I recommend you have congregants sign an informed consent that lays out the risk of these type of gatherings and identifies high risk groups who are particularly prone to bad health outcomes. Your congregants need to make fully informed decisions about the gatherings you host, and the responsibility of fully informing them lies with you. I also recommend that you obtain a line list of names and contact information for each participant at each gathering. You would maintain these lists and my staff would only ask for them if cases of disease were associated with your gatherings. These lists should be kept for 45 days and can then be destroyed. The lists allow for a swifter case investigation and contact tracing and the rapid initiation of appropriate isolation and quarantine of affected congregants should the need arise. Should the lists need to be used, please note that they are completely confidential and are protected from law enforcement and immigration authorities.





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If you do decide to proceed with gatherings, please be aware, smaller is safer and outdoor services are safer than indoor ones.

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens. I hope you understand that it is my belief that this is a short time in history where folks should get their spiritual nourishment in alternative ways to physically gathering. If you do let gatherings occur, please do them in the safest manner possible. I trust you will make the best decision for your congregation.

May you have courage and strength during this trying time,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Morrow MD". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Scott Morrow, MD, MPH, MBA, FACPM
San Mateo County Health Officer
