

**Transcription from Bishop David's video: Pastoral Correspondence regarding our continued COVID response for Holy Week aired on March 5, 2021.**

Hola! Good day sisters and brothers of EDSJ or anyone else either listening in or reading the transcribed version, in either English or Spanish, of this pastoral correspondence. Bishop David here. I hope my words find you all safe and well. I trust for those of you who live in California, you are aware a few weeks ago, the State of California altered its criteria, requirements within its color scheme, in response to COVID-19. Unfortunately, that was in part due to a suit that came to the State from religious organizations, of which we certainly weren't a part. So due to that fact, and the State's amendment, and the increase of vaccinations, which is a very good thing indeed, and thank you to those of you who have contacted me to give me updates on your vaccination journey, we called our diocesan COVID task force together for conversation, deliberation and discernment, and they met on two consecutive weeks. I invited them to ponder these changes and amendments, and to perhaps make a recommendation to me, which they did. In turn, I took that recommendation to our governing bodies, both Standing Committee and Diocesan Council met last week, and they also pondered and prayed about these recommendations, and they approved them. And so in this pastoral correspondence during this season of Lent, which I hope everyone, is a rich and memorable experience for you thus far, I provide now the work of the COVID task force and its approved form by our governing bodies.

We are providing a roadmap between now and Easter Day, and you can read this roadmap provided in written form, as well as we are strongly urging local faith communities to employ a survey (we are providing a template for that survey). The survey is simply designed, everyone, to test the pulse as it were, to engage in conversation with people from your respective faith community, regarding their comfort level with regards to the prospect of coming back together. And I'm not trying to cover everything in this pastoral correspondence, you'll have, again, documentation you can read and resources you can access. Suffice it to say, we are making allowance for during Holy Week, beginning on Passion/Palm Sunday, for an outside gathering. That outside gathering could be a procession of palms, Morning Prayer, an outside liturgy, again observing all the protocols that we have put in place and discussed over the last year. And then during Holy Week, we are inviting you, again making allowance for a Stations of the Cross experience, if you so desire and are inclined during the week, as I said, again, an outside experience, keeping social distancing, masks worn, certainly hands washed, etc. And then, everyone, and this the one that causes me most pause, to be honest with you, and again, I offer great caution and care as we consider this possibility, we are making allowance for on Easter Day, in person, inside Eucharist.

Now I want to say a couple of things about that. Firstly, that's going to require significant things to occur between now and then—making sure our spaces are adequately prepared, again, you'll see this in the resource we're going to provide, ensuring that ushers/greeters are prompted and formed/trained regarding how they do their work keeping one another safe, and

then how we, again, observe the protocols during that service. Now I want to be really clear about something, sisters and brothers, and this is essential that you hear me with absolute clarity—we presume this is not going to be “one size fits all;” in other words, it will perhaps come to pass that some of our faith communities will chose not to gather in the way we are offering allowance and permission to do so. We are leaving it to you to discern, pray and ascertain what is best for you. We are simply offering these “allowing parameters” if you will, for ways forward.

Now I also need to hasten to insert that no one knows what might happen between now and Holy Week. As you make preparations it is conceivable that things could go pear-shaped, as it were, and that we could return to a suspension in ways that we experienced at the end of last year. So we’re going to have to watch this space and play it by ear, as one does.

In the meantime, please know that you are held in our prayers, and that as you consider ways forward, for you and our local communities, you are not alone. And I ask that you discern, truly discern, what is the best course of action for you, and to ensure that everybody stays well, clergy and laity alike. This will require some holy candor and honest conversations on your part. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to reach out to the diocesan office and we will endeavor to respond as quickly as we can.

Bless you, bless you, three times bless you one and all, from the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin. Cheers everyone.