

COVID-19

Health Department Engagement Guide

How Parishes Can Engage with their Local Health Department

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” 2 Timothy 1:7

May 28, 2020



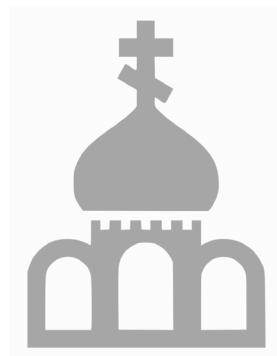
METROPOLIS OF
SAN FRANCISCO



PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to provide guidance to the Parish's Health Officer regarding how best to engage, and collaborate with, health officials and local public health departments as we move through the phases of reopening our churches.

PRIMARY GOALS FOR ENGAGING



Our Key Goals are simple:

1. **Find** the right contact in your local health department with whom to communicate.
2. **Inform** the local county health department that we are working on our plan to re-open the parish – so we can quickly respond once approved to do so by the state and county.
3. **Develop** rapport with the health department in case we have a question or need clarification on a topic.
4. **Learn** of any special requirements the health department may have regarding our reopening (one general rule is that the strictest of codes supersedes all others)
5. **Document** our efforts to work within the system and to coordinate in good faith



Who Should Engage?

The Ideal Parish Representative

1st Choice: Healthcare, medical or public health professional

2nd Choice: Legal professional

A person who has the training and background to be able to understand the medical and health related impacts and recognizes potential legal ramifications.



Step 1 Identify a Starting Point

Do Your Homework

Determine if anyone in the parish has any experience or contacts at the local or state health departments. If your parish has an annual Greek Festival it is likely that festival leadership may have already established a rapport with the health department. Ask them for guidance.

A personal introduction, at any level, will help you navigate the county health department and be much more efficient in reaching the key contacts.

In addition, search the Health Department Website for a Director of Health Equity and Diversity, Spiritual Outreach, Faith-based Communities or a related subdivision of the health department. This person will likely be sympathetic to our needs and may be able to connect you with those that can help.

Contact information is almost always publicly available on the health department website since these are public officials.

Press Releases

Your Health Department may have a section on their website where you can subscribe for Press Release alerts. You may want to consider doing this – many departments indicate that is the “official alert” they will use to communicate key decisions.



Step 2 Establish First Contact

Initial Contact

1. Send an email to your initial contact (see email tips below)
 - keep it brief
 - Be sure to use your professional signature – this signals to the official that you “speak the language” and are a professional as well
2. Have a clear message in the subject line (i.e. “COVID – 19 and Faith-based Communities - Who can offer guidelines?”)
3. If no response in 1-2 days, follow-up with a phone-call using the number provided on the website

WHEN SENDING AN INITIAL EMAIL

Key Points :

- Our goal is to communicate our desire to and work with them.
- Stress the urgent needs of our parish community to worship together once again – that it is an essential service.
- We have been developing a reopening plan for our parish and want to work with them to move this forward.
- Ask if they would be open to a brief phone call.
- Tip: Remember that any emails or written information you provide will become part of the parish’s permanent records.



Step 3 Find the Right Person

Build Rapport

- The goal is to get connected with a person who has some degree of influence or decision authority over policy making and rule enforcement.
 - This could lead you beyond your local health department to the state level.
 - Once you arrange a phone call, refer to the tips below.
- Keep in regular contact; reach out regularly in order to build rapport and stay “on their radar.”

WHEN HAVING AN INITIAL PHONE CALL

Key Points

1. Share our desire to coordinate efforts and work with them.
2. Express our needs in a concise manner.
3. Ask questions in order to fully understand the current guidelines they might have and any special and the mentality of the plan moving forward



Sample Email Template

Subject Line: Question Re: Guidance for Faith-based communities

Message:

Good morning Dr. XXX,

I hope this email find you well!

Dr. XXX recommended I reach out to you and I am doing so on behalf of my faith-based community. I have been asked by the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco to coordinate with our local health officials in our efforts to re-open our parishes throughout the county and Bay Area with the intention of establishing strict social distancing protocols which will be implemented during Phase 3. We, of course, plan to adhere to all policies and recommendations issued by our local and state health authorities, but it's been challenging to find clear guidance with the changing guidelines.

As we prepare for re-opening, given the communal nature of our worship services and also in view of these services as essential to the lives of many, we'd like to open a dialogue to be sure to work in collaboration with the health department and those who are making and implementing pandemic-related policies.

Would you be willing to meet with me for 30min sometime this week to discuss further?

I thank you very much for your consideration and for all you are doing to keep our community and county safe!

Sincerely,

xxx

xxxxxxx



Sample Contact Table

Document your contacts and progress using the contact table provided
(Example provided below)

| Date | Type of Contact | Name and credentials | Title | Health Dept Information | Contact Info (phone number and email) | Notes |
|------|-----------------|----------------------|-------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------|
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