

May 21, 2020

To all the faithful of the Archdiocese of Osaka

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Archbishop

**On precautionary measures against the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19)
infection (Part 8)**

+The Peace of the Lord be with you all!

As we all know, the state of emergency imposed on both Osaka and Hyogo Prefectures was lifted today, and Wakayama on May 14. Taking into account this kind of situation, we announce the following:

1. Starting with the mass on Pentecost Sunday, May 31, public masses (including anticipated masses) will resume. However, in case that it will be impossible, the person-in-charge of each parish or facility will decide whether or not public masses will resume on that day in their own respective locations.
2. Although the state of emergency has been lifted, it is important to continue the precautionary measures against the Novel Coronavirus infection. Please refer to the attached “Guidelines for Church gatherings during the Coronavirus pandemic” while adapting to each circumstance with regard to future church activities.
3. There will be no changes with regard to the already issued cancellation of meetings and events for the months of May and June.
4. We will issue another announcement in case that circumstances change.

*Translations to other major languages will be posted on the homepage in due time.

Guidelines for Church gatherings during the Coronavirus pandemic

The Church is the Assembly of God's people wherein priests, religious and lay faithful walk together towards the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. Now, the spread of Coronavirus infection is gradually slowing down, but finding a vaccine and a cure may still take time. As such, it seems that we will have to wait a little longer before returning to our normal life of faith, by means of gathering in the parishes. Until that happens, and until the eventual lifting of precautionary measures, the Church wants to join the entire Japanese society in adopting a new pattern of behavior in our daily lives. Here are some concrete guidelines:

As a rule, after lifts the state of emergency, the local government releases accompanying instructions, please follow them.

As the situation of each location (parish, religious congregation and facility), including its territory and the number of people gathering there, etc., is different, the people-in-charge of each location will ultimately decide on the details of what to do, while adapting to the circumstances of each location. The norms that we give below are at a general level:

1. The faithful of parishes where, as per the circumstances, have to continue the suspension of the public celebration of mass are dispensed from their Sunday obligation. Dispensed from the Sunday obligation also are the elderly, the sick, those who are at risk of illnesses, as well as those who provide care for them.
2. It is naturally the right of every member of the faithful to attend mass in any church he or she wishes to go. However, in the present situation, as it is necessary to place a limit on the number of the faithful participating in each mass and to increase or decrease the number of masses in some parishes, we request parishioners to refrain from going to other churches except the one they normally attend. Please offer as a prayer the inevitable suffering of not being able to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist.
3. We offer some possibilities on how to organize the Sunday mass while avoiding the creation of crowds:
 - ① If there are several Sunday masses in the parish, designate the faithful to one (1) mass according to their district or neighborhood.
 - ② If there is only one Sunday mass in the parish, group the faithful according to their district or last name and assign them to attend mass on one (1) Sunday of the month, making sure that everyone can participate in the Sunday mass at least once a month while avoiding the creation of crowds.

- ③ The parish can also organize other non-public celebrations of the mass, announcing the time of such celebration only to a limited number of people.
 - ④ Depending on the characteristics of each parish, and according to the season and atmospheric conditions, it may also be possible to celebrate the Holy Mass in open air.
 - ⑤ Similarly, although incomparable to attending Sunday masses, faithful who can attend weekday masses may be advised to do so instead of attending the mass on Sundays.
4. The church shall remain open as long as there are masses or other sacraments, funerals, recitation of the Holy Rosary, etc. We leave to the discretion of the person-in-charge the decision to leave the church open at other times.
5. Here are some points to be considered during the celebration of the Holy Mass:
- ① Maintain enough distance between each person who participates in the mass. In this way, the number of people who can fit into the church at one time can be estimated. Then, think of a way on how to have only those people who can fit into the space attend the mass. For example, consider the options suggested above in number 3. However, it may not be necessary to maintain such distance among people coming to mass together with their family or children.
 - ② All churchgoers must wear a mask.
 - ③ Make arrangements so that each churchgoer can participate in the mass without touching anything except his/her personal belongings. Do not use the Holy Water fonts. Leave the doors open and refrain from using the songbooks and prayer books. Assign someone to distribute the weekly missalette to each participant or leave several copies on the seats before the mass. Missalettes should be taken home after use instead of returning them to the church.
 - ④ Put alcohol or hand sanitizers at the entrance and in places that are frequently touched (ex.: elevator, handrails, etc.). After each gathering, please ventilate well and disinfect the pews.
 - ⑤ Before starting the mass, the celebrant and servers should wash their hands thoroughly, or use alcohol or hand sanitizer. Servers should wear mask and maintain enough distance between each other.
 - ⑥ Have the assembly refrain from singing during mass. Similarly, the assembly should also refrain from raising their voices when responding to the celebrant. The commentator will use the microphone to answer on behalf of the assembly instead. A representative may also sing during communion and other parts of the mass.

- ⑦ If there is no enough space between the assembly and the lectern or the pulpit, lectors and homilist should wear mask.
 - ⑧ Monetary offering should not be collected during mass. Everyone may drop his/her offering in the donation boxes as one enters or leaves the church.
 - ⑨ After the Prayer of the Faithful, the celebrant should wear a mask when approaching the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
 - ⑩ Bread and wine should not be brought in through a procession during offertory but should be prepared right at the altar.
 - ⑪ Do not shake hands or make any kind of physical contact while giving each other the sign of peace.
 - ⑫ After receiving the Holy Eucharist by himself and before distributing the Holy Communion to the assembly, the celebrant (or the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion) should wash his hands thoroughly, or use alcohol or hand sanitizer. In addition, he should wear mask while distributing Holy Communion.
 - ⑬ In case of a concelebrated mass, the ministers should receive Holy Communion in both species by dipping the Host into the chalice containing the Precious Blood, instead of receiving the Precious Blood by drinking directly from the chalice after receiving the Host.
 - ⑭ If the celebrant is already of advanced age, if possible, an Extraordinary Minister should administer Holy Communion instead.
 - ⑮ As much as possible, the faithful should receive Holy Communion in their hands and may remove their masks only at that moment. On the other hand, in order to avoid creating crowds, consider beforehand if it would be better for everyone to fall in a single line for communion while maintaining enough distance, or if people should just wait on their seats until a minister of the Holy Communion comes and administer to them.
 - ⑯ If instead of the Holy Communion, a blessing is given, avoid making physical contact by placing your hand above the head of the person.
 - ⑰ After the mass has ended, refrain from crowding at the exit by observing proper distance while leaving the church. Also, please refrain from gathering in the parish hall for a chat or a drink.
 - ⑱ Parish newsletters and other printed materials from the church should be distributed to each person by a representative instead of having everyone take them from a designated place. Leaving the printed materials on the seats may also be considered or just apply the same way on how to distribute the weekly missalette.
6. With regard to other sacraments, we give the following instructions:
- ① Baptisms, confirmations, and weddings have the tendency of close physical

contacts and can be prone to the spread of infection. Postpone them if possible. However, if they are to be celebrated, follow the instructions below:

- ② With regard to baptisms, use the short form. Avoid touching the baptized as much as possible. When anointing with oil, use one (1) absorbent cotton or cotton swab per each baptized person. Afterwards, burn all cottons used for disposal.
 - ③ With regard to confessions, both the penitent and the confessor should wear a mask and maintain enough social distance. Find a suitable place to protect of the seal of confession. Take note of the ventilation as well.
 - ④ With regard to confirmations, conduct the anointing of oil as in baptisms, by using one (1) absorbent cotton or cotton swab per each confirmand, all cottons subject to burning after use. Do not make physical contact with the confirmand when giving the greeting of peace.
 - ⑤ With regard to weddings, the celebrant should disinfect his hands before touching the rings. Take special care also when signing the documents and when handing them to the bride and groom.
 - ⑥ With regard to Anointing of the Sick, use the short form. Use one (1) absorbent cotton or cotton swab to anoint each sick person, all cottons subject to burning after use. Elderly priests should not administer this sacrament, if possible.
7. When administering the sacraments and providing pastoral care to persons infected with the Coronavirus, strictly follow the instructions of the medical institution or public health center.
 8. When providing pastoral care to persons not infected with the Coronavirus, those sick in hospitals or other facilities, the elderly living alone or persons in danger of death, take precautions so that there would be no infection on both sides (priest and faithful).
 9. When presiding a funeral or a wake, follow the directions given for the Sunday Mass. Also, take utmost care in accompanying the bereaved family in their time of grief.
 10. With regard to other gatherings conducted in the church or parish hall (including groups such as A.A., G.A., etc.), consider the instructions given above and let the person-in-charge decide for each case.

Let us all act diligently bearing in mind that we could be all infected or are already infected. In all instances, hold on to our faith and never lose hope. More than ever, let us take time to consider and to accompany the weakest who are most in need of our attention.