

Circular No. 20-10  
March 10, 2020

TO ALL THE BISHOPS AND THE DIOCESAN ADMINISTRATORS

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies and Reverend Administrators,

RE: PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY – COVID-19

*For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with Him. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11*

The Department of Health (DOH) has declared a state of public health emergency in the country. This according to our health officials is a call to greater preparedness if the spread of the Corona Virus continues to affect greater number of the population. This has caused more fear, anxiety, and genuine concern. We need to take all of these seriously. We have already issued some guidelines in the recent past on the matter but we need to respond to the situation now in consistent efforts together.

As Catholics, we believe that God uses material instruments to bring to us His blessings and presence. This is the reason why we use material elements in our sacraments and sacramentals.

The same material elements that bring us God’s blessings are also subject to the broken nature of our fallen world. Science and our God-given reason demand that we use every means available to protect ourselves and our families against the spread of COVID-19 and any other disease. In the face of this world wide pandemic we are demanded to exercise vigilance as a Church, lest our churches become venues of transmission of the disease.

The measures we are strongly recommending do not change the traditions of the Church but rather are temporary precautions during this time of crisis.

We continue to appeal to our priests and faithful to follow the hygiene protocol that the DOH has consistently requested to everyone, namely, the proper washing and sanitation of hands and avoidance of body contacts. There is nothing more effective measure in this crisis than the best effort to stay clean.

1. We recommend those feeling unwell physically to refrain from liturgical assemblies until they are certain of their diagnosis. Taking the basic steps of wellness as recommended by the health authorities is not only sensible, but wise and considerate of others. In truth, it is an expression of genuine charity. For vulnerable populations like elderly, those who are immunocompromised, they may view the celebration of Holy Mass on TV and the social media.
2. Clergy and the faithful alike should use best practices through careful hand-washing and frequent cleaning of liturgical space and objects (e.g. sacred statues and sacred vessels). Our liturgical spaces should be disinfected/sanitized after every liturgical services. We should also provide hand sanitizers at the doors of our Churches for the use of our church goers.
3. We continue to implement reception of Holy Communion by the hand. We also ask communion ministers both the ordained and the lay ministers to wear face masks when they give communion as a protection for themselves and for the communicants. They are to sanitize their hands before and after Holy Communion. They are to wash their hands according to the instructions of the DOH.
4. Holy Water fonts at the doors or entrances of Churches should be emptied during this time of crisis.
5. Confessions are to be done in the Confessionals with a protective cloth installed at the grill where penitents and confessors conduct the confessions. Since the Lenten season is the time for Kumpisalang Bayan, each bishop may grant the permission for the use of General Absolution in this cases. We are sending you an attachment on this.
6. We strongly appeal to all the faithful to refrain from kissing and touching sacred images and statues during this time of crisis. The recommendations in our previous letter concerning the celebration of the Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday are highly relevant and necessary now.
7. We are strongly urged by the DOH to cancel, postpone or suspend all gatherings of great number of people. Each Local Ordinary must discern on this matter and consider with great priority the safety and health of our faithful.
8. The World Health Organization (WHO) confirms that the coronavirus can spread through monetary bills/money. It can be a good practice to refrain from passing the box to the church goers rather to have the collectors hold the collection bag that is brought to the faithful. Those who count the collection must wear face mask and use alcohol after counting. It is better to provide them with latex gloves.

We continue to pray the Oratio Imperata we have requested to all the dioceses of the country. We pray that this pandemic might end quickly and that through the intercession of Our Holy Mother, the Help of Christians, and St. Raphael the Archangel, and all our Saints we may be delivered from this epidemic.

Sincerely yours,

ROMULO G. VALLES, D.D.  
Archbishop of Davao  
President, CBCP