

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN JAPAN FOR DEALING WITH INFECTIOUS DISEASES**

The New Coronavirus - COVID-19 infection that has spread around the world since early 2020 has had a tremendous impact on the international community and has dramatically changed our daily lives. Many people have lost their lives to the infection, and pandemic-caused isolation has made it impossible to give comfort in person to those who loved them and mourn their loss.<sup>1</sup> Yet we have seen many people confront the infection and fear, offering support and comfort.<sup>2</sup> As the whole world suffers, the many efforts toward healing and solidarity invite us to reflect on and act upon what we must do as Christians.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, we have decided that what we have learned as we groped to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic should be organized as guidelines for risk management in the event of any future infectious disease caused by a similar unknown pathogen. In using these guidelines, please adapt them as necessary, considering regional characteristics and circumstances in the diocese, district or parish. Since medical treatment may change depending on the disease, we recommend consultation with specialists and medical personnel.

These guidelines are based on the experience of responding to COVID-19. If in the future a new infectious disease emerges, we will revise them as necessary.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan  
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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Stretch Forth Your Hand to the Poor*, Message for the Fourth World Day of the Poor, November 15, 2020, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity: A Christian Call to Reflection and Action During COVID-19 and Beyond*, a co-publication of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches, pp.4-5.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IN THE EVENT OF AN OUTBREAK OF INFECTIOUS DISEASE**

### ***When an infectious disease outbreak occurs overseas***

Steps to take when an infectious disease has occurred and spread outside Japan, but no infections have been confirmed in Japan:

- Alert parishes.
- Request that parishioners who have traveled in an infected region within several weeks refrain from attending Mass and dispense them from the obligation to attend Mass.

### ***When an infectious disease outbreak occurs in Japan***

Steps to take when cases of infection have been confirmed in Japan, but the national and prefectural governments have not issued a state of emergency or a request to refrain from business or movement:

- Alert parishes.
- Wearing masks in the church by priests and congregations.
- Postpone meetings and events that are not urgent or essential.
- Request that the elderly or those who feel unwell refrain from attending Mass and dispense them from the obligation to attend Mass.
- No using the holy water font.
- Provide alcohol hand disinfectant at the church entrance.
- No offertory processions.
- No collections during Mass.
- No physical contact (handshakes, hugs, kisses, etc.) during the Sign of Peace.
- Request that people refrain from receiving the Eucharist on the tongue.

Regarding Masses and sacraments, please refer to Attachment 1: **Guidelines for sacraments and liturgical practices during infectious disease epidemics.**

### ***When an infectious disease spreads in Japan***

Steps to take when an infectious disease is spreading in Japan and the government has declared a state of emergency and requested refraining from business and movement:

- Cancel Masses with a congregation (Masses without a congregation may be celebrated) and dispense all Catholics from the obligation to attend Mass.
- Cancel all church activities except Masses without a congregation.
- Postpone the Sacraments of Baptism, Matrimony and Penance will. The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick should be administered only in case of emergency and with proper measures against infection.
- Funerals should be planned in consultation with the bereaved including sufficient measures against infection. Consideration should be given to cremating the remains but postponing the funeral to a later date.

### ***When an infectious disease continues in Japan***

Steps to take when a state of emergency and a request to refrain from business and movement have been lifted, but the infectious disease is still widespread.

- Public Masses may be celebrated after taking the following measures against infectious diseases. For details, refer to Attachment 1: **Guidelines for sacraments**

**and liturgical practices during infectious disease epidemics.**

- ❖ Limit the number of people to maintain sufficient social distancing.
- ❖ Request that the elderly or those who have underlying medical conditions refrain from attending Mass.
- ❖ Dispense all Catholics from the obligation to attend Mass.
- ❖ Wearing masks in the church by priests and congregations.
- ❖ Before entering the church, all attendees will have their temperature taken and will record of their name, contact information and the date.
- ❖ Provide alcohol hand disinfectant at the church entrance.
- ❖ No use of shared songbooks or prayer cards. They should be removed from the church.
- ❖ Worship aids should be taken home and not left behind. Extras should be discarded.
- ❖ No using the holy water font.
- ❖ Provide sufficient ventilation during Mass.
- ❖ No congregational singing. Provided sufficient social distancing is observed, Refrains and other songs may be sung by a small choir.
- ❖ Short homilies.
- ❖ No offertory processions.
- ❖ No collections during Mass.
- ❖ No physical contact (handshakes, hugs, kisses, etc.) during the Sign of Peace.
- ❖ Before Communion, both priests and congregation disinfect their hands again.
- ❖ Request that people refrain from receiving the Eucharist on the tongue.
- Sacraments
  - ❖ Baptism: it is desirable to celebrate baptism during Mass with a community but take sufficient measures against infection.
  - ❖ Weddings: take measures against infection and have only a small number of people.
  - ❖ Confession: take measures against infection and keep social distance between the priest and the penitent.
  - ❖ Anointing of the Sick: take sufficient precautions against infection.
- Funerals
  - ❖ Funerals should be planned in consultation with the bereaved including sufficient measures against infection.
- Activities
  - ❖ Avoid the "Three Cs" (closed spaces with poor ventilation, crowded places with many people nearby, close-contact settings, such as close-range conversations), keep social distance, and finish in a short time.

***When an infectious disease outbreak eases in Japan***

When the incidence of an infectious disease eases, the countermeasures in ***When an infectious disease outbreak occurs in Japan*** (above) are to be put into effect.

***When an infectious disease outbreak ends in Japan***

When an outbreak of an infectious disease has ended, normal church activities resume.

## **GUIDELINES FOR SACRAMENTS AND LITURGICAL PRACTICES DURING INFECTIOUS DISEASE EPIDEMICS**

### **1. Guidelines for Mass**

#### *Before and After Mass*

- Carefully disinfect frequently used areas (doorknobs, seats, etc.) in the church before and after each Mass.
- Do not place hymnals or worship aids in the pews.
- Do not use the holy water font at the entrance to the church until instructed that it is safe to do so.
- Prepare rubbing alcohol to disinfect hands throughout the church.
- The congregation must wear masks when entering the church and during Mass, except when receiving Communion. Celebrants (at least during the Liturgy of the Eucharist), concelebrants, deacons and other ministers must also wear masks during the Mass.
- The number of people who can attend Mass and the location of seats must be clearly posted at the entrance.
- The door to the church should be open. If anyone touches a doorknob, disinfect it immediately.
- Anyone entering the church must wear a mask and disinfect their hands.
- Someone should be designated to manage and guide participants.
- The congregation should maintain social distancing from each other. This also applies to the person in charge of music.
- In the sacristy, be careful to avoid the so-called "Three Cs" (closed spaces, crowded places, close-contact settings). Do not share hand wipes or towels.
- Prepare the bread and wine in advance at the credence table. Do not open the lid of a ciborium (pyx), and use a pall for the paten and chalice.
- Disinfect the doors and keys of the tabernacle and the lid of the ciborium (pyx).
- Disinfect microphones after use.
- Priests, ministers, and congregants must not share any objects in the church, sacristy, etc.

#### *During Mass*

- Priests, deacons and other ministers must always maintain social distance, being especially careful during processions, readings and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- Refrain from congregational singing for the time being. If possible, a cantor or small socially distanced choir may sing on behalf of the congregation. If necessary, organ music can replace singing.
- Do not use shared songbooks, prayer cards or Scripture reading texts. Use disposable worship aids that should not be shared.
- If a reader is accompanied by another minister, they must keep socially distanced from one another.
- Those who stand at the ambo (readers, preachers, those who announce prayer intentions) must not touch the microphone. Handheld microphones should not

be used.

- There is no offertory procession. Bread, wine, water and vessels are prepared in advance at the credence table.
- Donations are not collected during Mass but are received before or after the Mass to prevent infection.
- The altar is prepared by a single person, a lay minister (server), deacon, concelebrant or the principal celebrant.
- Place the ciborium (pyx) with bread on the altar with the lid closed. After pouring wine into the chalice, immediately cover it with a pall.
- At the greeting of peace, avoid touching each other. Each person should put their hands together and bow to one other.
- Before Communion, the priest, other ministers of Holy Communion, and the congregation once again disinfect their hands
- In a concelebration, a separate chalice from the principal celebrant's is prepared for the concelebrants, who then receive by intinction.
- An elderly priest or one with an underlying medical condition who presides over Mass alone may not distribute the Eucharist, but must leave it to a deacon, other priest or extraordinary minister of the Eucharist.
- Maintain social distance in the Communion procession. Adjust the width of the aisle and mark distances if possible. Guide the procession to proceed smoothly so that those who have already received and those who will receive do not cross paths.
- Priests and ministers who distribute the Eucharist must disinfect their hands before distributing the Sacrament. If physical contact with another person occurs while conferring the Eucharist, disinfect the hand immediately.
- Do not offer Communion from the cup to congregants.
- Those receiving Communion should be asked to stand and receive the Eucharist by hand. They should answer "Amen" before removing their mask, and immediately put on the mask after receiving.
- It is also possible for the congregation to respond "Amen" together before the distribution of Communion and then to receive silently.
- Purification of the principal celebrant's vessels is done by the priest himself. Purification of other vessels is left to either a deacon or another priest.
- Maintain social distance during the recessional.
- Immediately after Mass, dispose of used printed matter and clean and disinfect the church.
- If appropriate social distancing is possible Mass may be celebrated outdoors.

*For those who cannot participate in the Mass in person*

- Watch Masses streamed online if possible.
- Read and meditate on the Scripture readings of the day.

## **2. Guidelines for Sacraments of Initiation**

- The ceremony should be short, with a small number of participants.
- During the rite, the sign of the cross should not be made while touching the forehead of the one being baptized.

- Anointing with the Oil of Catechumens should be done using an oil-soaked cotton swab or cotton ball without directly touching the skin of the one to be baptized. When there are several baptisms, separate swabs or cotton balls must be used for each one.
- Ideally, baptism takes place during Mass in a community with adequate infection control.
- To avoid the risk of infection, it is advisable to perform a single separate Mass for each family or person.
- Avoid using a baptismal font if there are several baptisms.
- Wear masks as directed in the Mass guidelines above.
- Parents should hold a child being baptized, with godparents and other family members maintaining sufficient social distance.
- Readings and homilies should be short.
- When blessing the baptismal water, the priest must not touch the water or the baptismal font. He makes a sign of the cross without touching the water.
- Conferring the baptismal robe may be omitted. A white garment provided by the family may be used, but a garment may not be used for more than one person.
- The passing on of the baptismal candle may be omitted.
- An oiled cotton swab or cotton wool must be used when anointing to prevent the priest from touching the baptized with his fingers. When there are several baptisms, separate swabs or cotton balls must be used for each one.

### **3. Guidelines for Weddings**

- If the wedding takes place during Mass, the guidelines for Masses must be followed.
- Attendees must maintain sufficient social distance. Be especially careful when elderly people or people with underlying medical conditions are present.
- Attendance should be limited to as few people as possible.
- The priest must keep social distance from the bride and groom.
- Masks must be worn in accord with Mass guidelines.
- Refrain from congregational singing. To prevent infection a cantor may sing at a sufficient social distance. Singing may be replaced with organ music if necessary.
- The priest must maintain a social distance from the bride and groom during the vows. If possible, a microphone should be used so as not to speak loudly.
- The bride and groom may hold hands with each other while exchanging their marriage vows.
- During the exchange of rings, priests and witnesses must not touch the wedding rings. The priest must be especially careful when blessing the rings.
- Marriage certificates may be signed after rather than during the ceremony. Everyone who signs must disinfect their hands beforehand and keep a social distance from each other when signing. Prepare enough writing instruments for each signer to use a different one.
- During the nuptial blessing, the bride and groom join hands and bow their heads. The blessing should be invoked with the celebrant's hands held over the bride and groom without touching them, as usual.

#### **4. Guidelines for Confessions**

- Times for the sacrament of Penance should be announced in advance.
- The number of confessions per day should be limited to lessen the risk of infection.
- Avoid using confessionals. If it is unavoidable, put a transparent film on the grid or hang a curtain.
- Whenever possible, it is desirable to celebrate the sacrament in an open place such as the church.
- Both priest and penitent must wear masks.
- When the priest and the penitent face each other, they must keep a sufficient social distance and there should be a glass or acrylic plate between them. If such a plate cannot be installed, the priest and the penitent should avoid facing each other, for example sitting at a right angle to one another to prevent infection by aerosol droplets.
- To prevent infection between penitents carefully disinfect places such as chairs and kneelers that are touched by various people.
- The sacrament of forgiveness may be celebrated outdoors, but a sufficient social distance between the priest and penitent must be maintained and attention paid to the hygiene of the place.

#### **5. Guidelines for Visiting the Sick and the Anointing of the Sick**

- Care must be taken during home visits, including wearing masks, disinfecting hands and maintaining adequate social distance to prevent infection between the priest and those in the house.
- When visiting a medical institution, follow any prescribed instructions and pay close attention when moving from room to room. The same applies when visiting facilities for the elderly.
- The priest should wash his hands thoroughly or disinfect them before entering a sickroom. During the ritual, the priest must keep a social distance from the sick person and avoid physical contact, praying with hands stretched out over the sick person.
- Anointing should take place with a cotton swab or cotton ball soaked in the Oil of the Sick beforehand so that the priest does not touch the sick person directly.
- Priests, deacons and lay ministers who visit homes and sickrooms to distribute communion should prepare their own clean pyx. Before touching the tabernacle, they must carefully wash or disinfect their hands. Once the Eucharist is placed in the pyx or other container, the lid should not be opened again until the Eucharist is administered. If necessary, the door and key of the tabernacle should be disinfected.
- Any texts must be printed on disposable paper and discarded immediately after use. Shared ritual books, prayer books, or hymnals may not be used.
- Clean (disinfect) the pyx with a mild detergent after each use and dry it well.

#### **6. Guidelines for Wakes and Funerals**

- Follow the guidelines for Masses as a basic precaution to prevent mutual infection.

- Attendees should maintain social distance from each other.
- Disinfectant alcohol should be prepared in a place that is easy for everyone to use.
- Avoid sharing writing instruments as much as possible. When sharing, use a disinfected one each time.
- If there are multiple funerals in a single day, allow sufficient time between ceremonies.
- Priests and ministers must disinfect their hands before and after the ceremony and avoid physical contact with mourners and caskets.
- Bereaved families and attendees should avoid physical contact such as shaking hands and hugging. If mourners are from a country or ethnic group that has a habit of giving such greetings, they should be given appropriate guidance.
- Shared worship aids may not be used. Instead, use disposable printed matter. Printed materials must not be shared.
- Attendees should refrain from singing. Cantors may sing at a sufficient distance to prevent infection. Organ music may be used if necessary.
- Incense may be omitted as it can induce coughing that increases the risk of infection.
- At crematoria and cemeteries, comply with their rules.

**Note:** These “Guidelines for the Catholic Church in Japan for dealing with infectious diseases” and Appendix 1: “Guidelines for sacraments and liturgical practices during infectious disease epidemics” were prepared under the supervision of the Japan Catholic Medical Association and the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan Committee for the Liturgy.

## GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION REGARDING INFECTIOUS DISEASES

### *Appropriate information sources*

- Credence should only be given to information from trustworthy professionals such as public sector announcements, the Japan Catholic Medical Association, doctors, and Catholics in the medical field. Do not be fooled by rumors.

### *Disclosure of information*

- Appropriately distinguish between "information to be disclosed" and "information not to be disclosed." Publication does not mean full disclosure. For example, particular attention must be paid to the protection of personal anonymity.
- It is necessary to disclose information when a new infection case occurs in church activities. However, if a parishioner contracts a new type of infectious disease in daily life or social life outside the church, it is not necessary to publicize it.
- Such announcements should be posted on an official website. When the number of infected people is large or when clusters occur in multiple parishes, press releases and press conferences for various media should be considered. (A cluster is five or more cases.
- Announcements of infections must be done inside and outside the church at the same time. Avoid situations where "insiders" (priests, parishioners) learn for the first time from an outside source.
- A spokesperson must also respond to the dissemination of rumors and fake news. In responding to the Internet or social media, the spokesperson must take a strict stance, requesting deletion from the operator or disclosure of the IP address. This might involve securing legal counsel.

**Note:** This Appendix 2 was developed based on 新型コロナウイルスに関する危機管理広報初動マニュアル (crisis management public relations initial manual for the new coronavirus) published by Inoue Public Relations Co., Ltd., supervised by Professor Kuniyoshi Shirai of The Graduate School of Information & Communication, 2020).