

March 13, 2020

Dear Catholic Sendai Diocesan Parishioners,

Precautionary Measures Concerning COVID-19 from 15th March and Beyond

The spread of infections and serious cases due to COVID-19 have been reported one after another, and Church activities such as public masses have been suspended in different parts of the world. Fortunately, in Tohoku region, there is only one case each in Miyagi, Akita, and Fukushima prefectures. Even if these cases have been identified in different areas, the spread of the virus is unpredictable. Furthermore, considering the situation in Japan, it is difficult to stop the increase in the number of infected people.

In light of these circumstances, kindly take note of the following specific precautionary measures from 21st March and beyond:

1. All parishioners are dispensed from their obligations to attend Sunday Mass **from March 21 (Saturday) to April 3 (Friday)**. However, we encourage everyone to continue their personal encounter with the Lord through reading the Scriptures and personal prayers.
 2. On the other hand, the priests have decided to give communion to those who wish to receive it in their parishes on Sunday Masses. Please read the attachment on “Guidelines in Receiving Communion” and discuss the time and method of giving and receiving communion with your priests in the different parishes.
 3. Concerning weddings and funerals, consult with the priest in charge and the person concerned on taking adequate precautionary measures against infections before proceeding as usual.
 4. For events other than masses, as much as possible kindly consider postponing or canceling them, except only for small gatherings. In case of holding such events, in addition to hand disinfection, kindly provide sufficient ventilation, keep a distance between each other, and try to finish as quickly as possible.
 5. We hope that this announcement will be given to the parishioners in various ways by March 21 (Saturday). Likewise, inform the foreign parishioners as soon as possible.
- ❖ We still do not know what will be the situation after April 4 (Saturday). Nevertheless, we will make an announcement again by March 27 after taking into considerations the situation and advices from experts.

Bishop Martin Tetsuo Hiraga
Catholic Sendai Diocese

Guidelines on Receiving Communion in time of COVID-19
Board of Council of Priest

In order to prevent the transmission of the Novel Corona Virus, a directive was issued to cancel all large gatherings or crowds, including masses, from March 2 to March 20 in Sendai Diocese. However, there is a concern that this infectious disease is unlikely to end even after March 21. In so doing, it will be difficult to resume the Holy Mass. The assertion that "Catholics definitely need masses and communions" will not hold true in Japanese society. Rather, it will be a great risk if we make a stand on this statement. Besides, this is the exact opposite of the message, "Protect All Life". In this case, consider the following guidelines:

1. If masses are not performed due to an infectious disease, the believers normally would not receive communion. But, can this case be considered as "Holy Communion of the sick"? There is no difference between, "I cannot go to mass because of I have a disease" and "I cannot go to mass because of the danger of having the disease." Perhaps because of the fear of being infected, all the more the Catholics need the Eucharist's comfort and encouragement.
2. The "Communion of the Sick (short ceremony)" is listed on page 86 of the "Book on Catholic Rites, Communion at Times Other than Mass: Revised New Edition". This rite is used when worshipers are waiting in separate rooms, such as in Catholic hospitals. The fact that masses do not take place in parishes means that the congregation cannot attend masses, but the situation of Holy Communion is the same as that of Catholic hospitals, where many sick people are waiting for Holy Communion. Therefore, I think it is possible to give the Eucharist to Catholic believers who come to church according to the format of this "Communion of the Sick" (short ceremony)".
3. As a countermeasure against infectious diseases, it is necessary to devise ways to give the holy communion with the shortest possible contact. Set a certain time (for example, during a typical Sunday Mass), announce it and have them come to church, keep a proper distance between people, and give and receive communion as quickly as possible. Priests should also wear masks and require priests and worshipers to immediately disinfect their hands with alcohol.

To prevent infection, please be aware that communion cannot be performed directly by mouth.

4. In that case, I think that the worshipers should be instructed, "Before coming to the worship service, each should read the gospel reading of the day and recite the Lord's prayer (Our Father)."
5. Number 3 and 4 should be discussed with the priests in each district for a better method.

This (Time of Cancellation of Holy Mass) should only be regarded as a response during this period. We thank Pope Francis for saying that the Church is a "field hospital", and we look forward to considering what to do for those who are hungry for the Eucharist. Thank you very much.