



ARCHDIOCESE OF CACERES
OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP
Archbishop's Residence
Naga City

CIRCULAR

Number 0015
Series of 2020

TO: ALL THE PRIESTS AND FAITHFUL IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CACERES
RE: PASTORAL GUIDELINES IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CACERES IN VIEW
OF THE MINIMUM HEALTH STANDARDS ON COVID-19

The Archdiocese of Caceres continues its efforts to help combat COVID-19 in the country. Consistent with this aim and in view of recent developments, the Archdiocese shall observe the Minimum Health Standards in the exercise of ministry to help prevent the spread of the virus in our communities.

While we advocate social distancing, sanitation and monitoring as important measures to stop transmission in this new normal situation, the exercise of our Faith must remain vibrant as it is essential in the integral well-being of our people.

Hence, the Archdiocese of Caceres, upon consultation with the clergy, provides these guidelines so the clergy, the faithful, and partners of the Archdiocese of Caceres may significantly participate in the social solution against the pandemic and in works of faith and evangelization.

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

In public gatherings, the faithful are required to wear face masks, observe social distancing and practice regular hand sanitation.

Pastors must study the layout of the parish Church and chapels to facilitate the implementation of the following:

1. Designate entrance and exit doors to avoid crowding. Churchgoers are subject to temperature checks prior to entering the church. Footbath shall be installed at the entrance doors. Hand sanitizers or alcohol dispensers shall be made available at strategic entry points.
2. Seat plan of two meters apart. Pews can be marked for proper guidance of churchgoers.
3. Regular sanitation of Churches and chapels, including the furniture, equipment and materials used in celebrations (microphone, vessels, pews and chairs).
4. Designate ushers or usherettes to facilitate the movements of people inside the Church.

Parishes are asked to proactively respond to our current situation by:

1. Maintaining close coordination with the local government units and health workers. Assess the necessity of designating a specific area or setting up tent where medical emergencies can be given attention. Emergency contact numbers should be displayed conspicuously in the parish office. Implement

such other practical means necessary to ensure safe communal activities inside the Church.

2. Reaching out to all parishioners by maximizing the use of digital media such as livestream, community radio, public sound system.
3. Strengthening communal efforts initiated in families and small Christian communities.

Families are encouraged to pray together before their altars at home. Parents can initiate the reading of the Gospel with their children. Seniors with health issues who are asked to stay home, may attend Mass through media and share to their families their reflections about the Gospel.

A. CELEBRATION OF THE HOLY MASS

1. PUBLIC MASSES may be celebrated subject to the current health situation of the community. But in all cases, the guidelines of social distancing, sanitation and monitoring must be observed.
2. Churches must accommodate only such number of churchgoers where churchgoers will be seated two (2) meters apart.
3. The Church grounds can be used to accommodate the faithful if weather permits.
4. In parish churches where space is very limited, the use of church grounds and open space is recommended.
5. Pastors may hold additional Masses to accommodate parishioners and avoid crowding per Mass.
6. The duration of the celebration may be shortened to lessen the exposure of the minister and the faithful.
7. Concelebration of priests may be allowed at the sanctuary with limited number and social distancing.
8. Servers and extraordinary ministers must also observe social distancing. Their number must be limited only for essential services during the mass.
9. Holding hands when praying the Lord's Prayer and when giving the sign of peace during the Mass are discouraged.
10. During communion, ministers must use face mask and gloves in distribution. Sanitation of hand before distribution is necessary.
11. Communion by the hand must be observed at all celebrations.
12. Communion by rows is highly encouraged.
13. Vessels and linens may be placed at the credence table near the altar in order to limit the movements and numbers of servers.
14. For offerings, physical contact should be avoided. To do this, churches may place collection boxes, use collections bags with stick or encourage electronic transfers for donations.
15. Veneration of sacred objects and images by kissing or touching is strictly prohibited.

a. Funeral Masses

The faithful during funeral masses should also observe social distancing and wearing of mask. The use of pall (white cloth) during the funeral mass shall be excluded in the rites.

b. Celebration of Marriage

Marriage celebration shall observe social distancing, limited by the church's seating capacity and such number as advised by the local government.

c. Fiesta Masses and Other Celebrations of Holy Mass

1. Fiesta Masses must be celebrated observing social distancing and wearing of mask.

2. The parish shall coordinate with the LGU or Barangay for proper implementation.
3. Baptism by cluster may also be administered provided the Church or chapel can accommodate them while observing social distancing and limited to two sponsors only per child. The parents shall be reminded of their primary responsibility to ensure the safety of the child during baptism.

B. BAPTISM

1. Individual baptism is highly encouraged with only the parents and two sponsors present.
2. Baptism by cluster may also be administered provided the Church or chapel can accommodate them while observing social distancing and limited to two sponsors only per child. The parents shall be reminded of their primary responsibility to ensure the safety of the child during baptism.
3. The signing of the cross on the forehead during baptism must be limited to the cleric and the parents.
4. In the anointing of chrism, cotton balls should be used once for each candidate for baptism. Burn used cotton balls at a suitable time.

C. CONFIRMATION

1. Regular Wednesday Mass Confirmation at the Archbishop's residence is temporarily suspended until further notice. Individual Confirmation may be accommodated from Monday to Saturday.
2. Parish Priests are hereby delegated to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation for wedding purposes only, scheduled until December 2020 within the Archdiocese. This special delegation is valid until December 31, 2020 or unless earlier revoked by the Archbishop.
3. Confirmation may be administered in the place of marriage or in their parish domicile or quasi-domicile.

D. ANOINTING OF THE SICK

1. Appropriate measures like wearing of mask, gloves, and the necessary preparation must be observed.
2. Pastors must use the proper personal protective equipment in case of Covid-19 patients. Coordinate with health workers in this matter for special preparations and after-visit protocols.

E. CONFESSION

1. Confessions are to be done in the confessionals with a protective plastic installed at the grill. Wearing of masks is required.
2. If individual confession is not possible, general absolution may be given.

F. DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES

1. Public devotional practices are temporarily suspended. Devotional practices to be celebrated at home are highly encouraged.

G. OFFICES

1. Office personnel should wear masks and observe proper sanitation and distancing.

H. OTHERS

1. A votive Mass for the intention of the eradication of pandemic may be celebrated in parishes during weekdays following the rites proposed by Pope Francis.

I. PRAYER

As a Church, we recognize our need to express our faith and strengthen our spiritual well-being in the midst of the pandemic. May these guidelines lead us as one community in responding to this enormous challenge of our times.

We continue to entrust our community to the Divino Rostro, the expression of the mercy of God, and through the loving intercession of our Ina, Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia.

Given at the Chancery, Pilgrim City of Naga, Republic of the Philippines, this 27th of May in the Year of our Lord, 2020.


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Archbishop of Caceres