



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF LAGOS

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Special Circular

AUGUST, 2020 /No. 095.1

**TO ALL PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS WORKING IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF LAGOS, AND
THE LAY FAITHFUL**

Dear Msgri. /Frs., Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

UPDATED SAFETY GUIDELINES AS WE BEGIN PUBLIC MASSES AGAIN

Since the 22nd of March, 2020, we have suspended the celebration of public Masses in our Archdiocese in line with the need to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. We as a People of God: Clergy, Religious and Lay faithful, have supported the State Government in her efforts to curb the spread of this virus. We have complied with the Covid-19 safety measures put in place by the State Government and the NCDC. The past four months have been a period of spiritual, emotional and material difficulty for us but we never doubted the presence of the Lord with us in the midst of the storm. He was by our side guiding us through the most challenging times and now we are set to resume public Masses even if with some restrictions. So, we thank the Lord and commend the People of God in our Archdiocese, the lay faithful, the Religious and the Priests, for the equanimity with which we weathered the stormy times.

However, we must not make the mistake of letting down our guards because the Covid-19 pandemic is still very much with us. We must just learn to live with it so that as we move on with our lives, we also do our best and make the best possible efforts to remain safe and healthy.

Throughout this period, we have been in dialogue with other Christians and the State Government on what we must do in order to gather in worship and at the same time keep ourselves safe. Drawing from these engagements, we now present for execution the updated safety guidelines to guide the parishes and the faithful as we eventually resume celebration of public Masses. **Kindly note that the updated parts of the previous guidelines are emboldened to call attention to them.**

1. REQUIREMENTS OF CHURCHES AND PLACES OF WORSHIP.

- a. Church premises and environment must be clean at all times
- b. Parishes should ensure well-ventilated spaces for worship at all times. The **Use of Air Conditioners is NOT allowed.**
- c. Hand washing facilities i.e. running water and soap should be provided at entry points and strategic places within the church premises.
- d. Hand Sanitizers must be provided at major entrances to Church premises.
- e. Proper refuse bins should be put in place within church premises so that people can properly dispose tissue paper/face mask.
- f. Parishes should have **clearly displayed** designated points for entry and exit.
- g. Trained personnel are to check body temperature at entry points.
- h. **Churches should be decontaminated before the first Mass of the day and after the last mass of the day, while wiping of surfaces should be carried out after each Mass.**
- i. Physical distancing horizontally and vertically of two (2) meters should be ensured.
- j. Parishes can admit **ONLY 50%** of the capacity of their Church buildings for each Mass on Sundays only.
- k. Other safety measures should be put in place (First Aid boxes, Fire Extinguishers, Muster Points, Emergency Exit Points etc.)

2. PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOLS

- a. Anyone coming into the Church premises must wear a face mask.
- b. Anyone coming into the Church premises must submit to body temperature check.
- c. After the temperature check at the gate, parishioners should **wash or sanitize** their hands before entering the Church building.
- d. **Parishes must have a Record of attendance at every Mass which should show name, age, sex, address and telephone/email of parishioners present at each Mass in case of need for contact tracing.**
- e. Public Masses are to be celebrated on **SUNDAYS ONLY**. Masses should be between one and two hours, with enough time allotted between Masses for parishioners to exit the church and for surfaces of pews to be wiped.
- f. Public weekday masses are **NOT** permitted for now.

- g. Celebration of Wedding masses, Baptisms and Funerals are permitted, with not more than 50 people present including the Ministers. In preparing people for marriage or baptism, there must be compliance with the Covid-19 protocols.
- h. Celebration of Masses on Sunday evenings are also allowed as long as people can conveniently get back home safely before the curfew.
- i. Celebration of more than one Mass simultaneously at different venues in the Church premises is allowed as long as the regulations are kept at each venue.
- j. For Masses to be celebrated at the Outstation, absolute compliance with the Covid-19 protocols must be ensured.
- k. Meetings of Societies and Pious Associations are not permitted for now.
- l. The elderly i.e. those above 65 years of age, are dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday. However, should they wish to attend, special considerations should be given to them. A particular Mass should be set aside for the elderly ones and if more convenient, the front pews should be reserved for them.
- m. Children, from age 12 and below, should stay back to worship from home for the next 8 weeks.
- n. In addition, the following are also dispensed from the obligation to attend mass:
 - Nursing mothers
 - Those who feel sick
 - Those who don't feel safe or comfortable enough to gather in a crowd even with the precautions we have put in place.

3. PARTICULAR LITURGICAL PRACTICES AND ACTIONS

- a. Only Priests should celebrate Mass without wearing face masks. Other liturgical ministers on the sanctuary should wear face masks.
- b. Where processions are to be made, the shortest possible route is to be used. Priests and other ministers should be in a **SINGLE FILE** with the required physical distance maintained.
- c. The number of Ministers on the sanctuary should be reduced to the barest minimum. A Lector and two Mass servers at most is recommended.
- d. There should be minimal contact between the Ministers on the sanctuary; their sitting positions should be arranged bearing the required physical distance in mind.
- e. Proper hygiene should be observed in the use of the microphone. Sharing of microphones should be discouraged. More microphones should be provided.

- f. For Offertory Collections, collection bags with long handles should be used or else offertory baskets should be used with parishioners going to the foot of the sanctuary while maintaining the required physical distancing.
- g. There should be no offertory procession. The gifts for the Eucharist should be left on the Credence Table from where Altar Servers would bring them to the Priest for preparation.
- h. The Sign of Peace is to be omitted.
- i. **Priests, Deacons and Extra-ordinary Ministers of the Holy Communion should sanitize their hands before distribution of Holy Communion.**
- j. Whenever there is Concelebration, provision should be made for an additional Chalice separate from the one from which the Chief Celebrant receives the sacred specie. Other priests would receive communion by intinction such that only the last of the concelebrants receives directly from the chalice.
- k. The Ciborium containing the small hosts for the distribution of Holy Communion should remain covered during consecration. The same thing should be done when there is more than one Chalice for consecration.
- l. Those to receive communion are to come forward and **stand** at the foot of the Sanctuary while maintaining the required physical distance.
- m. Holy Communion should be received directly on the palm of the hand; no hand gloves.
- n. **Holy Communion should be given without the words by the Priests since face masks will not be worn. The communicant however, is expected to say "Amen" when the Holy Communion is presented.**
- o. Thanksgivings should be earlier arranged with the Parish Priest, with due consideration for the required physical distancing.
- p. **Sharing of vestments by Liturgical ministers should be discouraged.**
- q. The use of the Holy Water font remains suspended

Live-streamed liturgies: we encourage parishes to continue the live streaming of Masses in order to provide for those dispensed from Sunday Masses. We hope to continue the broadcast of one of the Masses in the Cathedral every Sunday on Lumen Christi Television

OTHER SACRAMENTS AND PASTORAL ACTIVITIES

1. Penance/Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Penance should be scheduled, taking into account the number of individuals permitted to gather. Confessions are **not to be heard** in small spaces (e.g.,

traditional confessionals, reconciliation rooms, etc.). A big space which allows for required physical distancing, privacy and above all the maintenance of the dignity of the Sacrament is to be adopted for use. Priests are allowed to hear confessions under the following conditions:

- Priest and penitent must wear face mask
- Both maintain physical distance.
- The sacredness of the sacrament is **not to be compromised**.

2. Pastoral Care for the Sick and Dying

Priests are encouraged to continue to pastorally care for the sick, the elderly and those who cannot attend mass. Care for the sick and elderly which includes Communion, Anointing of the Sick, and Penance, may be celebrated for those in need at the discretion of the priest. In such situations, priests should ensure the following:

- that both Priest and recipient wear face masks
- they observe the required physical distancing
- Anointing will be done using a piece of cotton wool.
- Use of hand sanitizer before and after the sacrament has been administered

3. Baptism

The Sacrament of Baptism may once again be administered, taking into account the number of individuals permitted to gather while observing the required physical distance. Baptism may be celebrated given the following conditions:

- Anointing should be carried out using cotton wool, a fresh cotton wool should be used to anoint each candidate; the priests sanitizes his hands immediately afterwards.
- The rite of Laying on of hands should be carried out without physical contact.
- The Rite of *Ephatha* may be carried out without physical contact.

4. Marriage

The Sacrament of Marriage may be administered taking into account the number of individuals permitted for gathering, while observing physical distance except for the couple for whom physical nearness is inevitable.

5. Funerals

Funerals may take place in compliance with the number of individuals permitted to gather while observing physical distance.

My dear brothers and sisters, as we begin the celebration of public Masses, we require that all Priests, Religious and the Lay Faithful of our Archdiocese should carefully study and implement these updated guidelines. These are indeed unusual times for the whole world and the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to adopt modifications in our way of worship. We shall monitor the situation of things as they develop and review these Guidelines as needs arise. We must all keep in mind our obligation to protect ourselves and the faithful entrusted to our care as well as all our loved ones. May God keep us safe and command this virus to depart from our world.

Finally, we cannot over-emphasize the fact that these modifications are **temporary** and their use is strictly for this period alone. We must not get so used to them that we begin to see them as normal. Therefore, if there are so-called *new normal* situations, they do not pertain to the core of the teachings and rites of celebrating the liturgy even if they have been modified for the moment. Physical presence at Mass, reception of Holy Communion as prescribed as well as other practices remain the ordinary ways and the present practices are merely extra-ordinary. May the Lord strengthen our faith and keep our feet on the path of life eternal.

(Signed)

+ Alfred Adewale Martins

Archbishop, Metropolitan See of Lagos

7th August, 2020