



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF LAGOS

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Special Circular

MARCH, 2020 /No. 90.2

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

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

ON CURTAILING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

Greetings from the Chancery. God bless you all.

You would recall that we issued a Special Circular on March 15, 2020, in which we gave further directives on the proactive ecclesiastical steps we needed to take as an Archdiocese to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus. We emphasized that these are critical times and as such critical measures needed to be taken. We also mentioned that we shall continue to monitor the situation in order to make adjustments as required.

The Corona Virus pandemic has continued to ravage the world and the number of people infected has increased at an alarming rate within one week in our country Nigeria. This has made the Government of Lagos State to put a limit on the number of people that can gather together in public at 50.

As a Church, we are concerned about Public health and welfare as well as the protection of our faith and practices at the same time. We have been rather appalled at the level of preparedness to confront the pandemic in our Public health facilities given the experiences related by some of those who have had the need to contact the facilities or have had to use them.

We worry that the areas that need to be addressed such as the land borders, (through which an infected person was reported to have already arrived in the country), are still largely unattended with regard to the coronavirus spread; the public transportation system and other public gatherings that could be sources of the spread of the virus are still very much

unregulated. These make us fear that the measures we are to take with regards to public gathering to worship may be undermined by these other factors.

However, we have a responsibility to cooperate with government with regard to welfare of citizens while also taking cognizance of the sacredness of our faith and practices. For this reason, we are constrained to make some adjustments that would alter some aspects of our lives as a faith community.

Given our duty to **help protect public health in cooperation with the State Government as well as protect the values of our faith**, we hereby make the following pronouncements:

- a. In line with the authority that devolves to the Local Ordinary at critical times such as this, we hereby pronounce that the **elderly (65 years and above), pregnant women, nursing mothers and children below 18 years and those with serious health conditions** who are more susceptible to infection by the virus are hereby relieved of their obligation to attend Mass even on Holy Days of Obligation and Sundays for the period of the next four weeks with immediate effect.
- b. At this critical time, those among the faithful who consider that their health is jeopardized by attending Public gatherings, including Masses are also relieved of the obligation to attend Mass even on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation for the period of four weeks with immediate effect.
- c. We actively encourage all the faithful to take advantage of following the Mass to be streamed live and on the Lumen Christi Television Network during the period of this emergency. We can make a **Spiritual Communion** at the appropriate time during the Mass. It is a part of our spiritual heritage that when circumstances such as the present one happens and we are not able to go to Mass, we can make a **Spiritual Communion**. Our faith teaches us that the **Spiritual Communion** is as effective as when we physically receive the sacred species, the Body and Blood of Christ. This is necessary so as to ensure that Sunday Masses are not crowded beyond the number
- d. **Celebration of Masses:** Public Masses on Sundays would be with not more than 50 persons.
 - Parishes should consider making use of other available spaces within the Church premises such as Parish Halls to increase the number of Masses to be celebrated on Sundays.

- Parishes should also use the Small Christian Communities as venues for Masses.
- Parishes can also make use of projector screens to transmit Mass to other locations around the Church.
- At this time, Saturday evening Mass in lieu of obligation for Sunday should be used more.
- It is important to emphasize the need for maintaining the required social distance and spacing especially when attending Mass.
- **We shall review this present directive with regards to Public Mass in due course as we continue the process of discernment.**

e. **Other Sacraments:**

- At this time, Penitential Service with General Absolution is permitted, taking care not to have more people than the recommended number and with the appropriate social distance.
- Visit of the sick for the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick should be done **ONLY** when **ABSOLUTELY** necessary and should be done with extreme caution even if it means using cotton wool for the anointing and wearing facial masks.
- Funerals should be celebrated only if **absolutely unavoidable** and should be with no more than 50 people in attendance.

f. **Meetings of Societies:** Associations of the lay faithful can have their meetings as long as they are not more than 50 people in attendance.

g. **Devotions:** Parishioners are encouraged to have the Stations of the Cross as private devotions. Blessing of religious articles and persons must be without touching.

h. **Holy Week Ceremonies:**

- **Palm Sunday:** Public procession with Palm fronds is suspended. The Rite of blessing palms in the Church is to be used.
- **Chrism Mass:** The Chrism Masses would be only for Priests and those appointed. It would be celebrated observing the required Social distance in the big Churches that we use for the two Masses. Priests should make arrangements to collect the Sacred Oils from the Chancery at their convenience.

- **Mass of the Lord's Supper:** Parish Priests should choose those who will be in attendance from among the different groups and Associations in accordance with the size of their Church buildings. There should be no washing of feet.
 - **Good Friday:** Veneration of the Holy Cross on Good Friday should also be by choosing those to be in attendance according to the size of the Churches ensuring that the Social distance required is maintained. Adoration of the cross would be by simple genuflection.
 - **Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday:** Celebration should be limited to those previously chosen according to the same conditions as on Holy Thursday and Good Friday.
 - **Easter Monday:** Parish *Galilee Day Celebration* is hereby suspended.
- i. **Live Streaming:** Kindly note that efforts are being made that the activities of Holy Week would be streamed live from the Cathedral and would also be broadcast on Lumen Christi Television Network.
- j. **Churches:** Our Churches remain open and are available for private prayers. We know that the importance of prayers cannot be overemphasized especially now. We need God's intervention at this critical time more than ever before.
- The checking of temperature is mandatory in all parishes.
 - Where possible running taps with soap should be provided around the church premises or at the very least hand sanitizers. The faithful should be encouraged to take their hand sanitizers with them all the time.
 - Parishes should enlist the help of medical and health workers to assist in creating awareness and sensitizing the faithful. We encourage our parishioners to avoid close contact with people who show symptoms of the virus.
 - Parishioners who feel unwell are strongly encouraged to seek medical assistance.

Knowing full well that the salvation of souls is the supreme law, we enjoin priests to apply pastoral discretion in carrying out the above directives.

Finally, my dear brothers and sisters, we want everyone to understand that these are extreme circumstances with safety of life and public health at stake. We expect all Catholics to comply with these directives. We strongly encourage all our people to intensify their prayers, both as individuals or families that the Lord will deliver us from this evil and bring an

end to this Pandemic, bring healing to those affected and repose to the souls of those who have died. Be glad in hope, constant in tribulation, persevering in prayer. (Romans 12:12).

Ab omni malo: Libera nos Domine!

(signed)

+Alfred Adewale MARTINS

Archbishop of Lagos

March 20, 2020

ARCHDIOCESE OF LAGOS