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PASTORAL LETTER ON COVID-19 - SUSPENSION OF MASSES AND LARGE GATHERINGS

My dear People of God,

Over the past weeks, we have provided medical and public health advisories to minimize the risk of a cluster outbreak of the COVID-19 among our congregations and priests.

We have even considered mandating compulsory taking of temperature. Yet, we are also aware that temperature-taking is not a fool-proof screening tool as persons who are asymptomatic can also be carriers of the infection. Thus, implementing temperature screening may not entirely help prevent the spread of this infection even though it does mitigate the possibility of its transmission. As Catholics, we need to be responsible in playing our part to contain the spread of this virus by avoiding large gatherings of people.

Hence, given the current escalating situation which is proving to be difficult to contain, all public Masses, both on weekdays and weekends will be suspended indefinitely with effect on Saturday, 15 February, 12pm until there is greater clarity on the way forward. Likewise, all other public events with large numbers of people attending, such as formation sessions, retreats and seminars should be suspended.

Nevertheless, the cancellation of Masses does not mean that Catholics can excuse themselves from fulfilling the obligation of keeping the Day of the Lord holy. They should try to follow the broadcast of the Mass on YouTube or CatholicSG Radio. Please check the archdiocesan website for the time of the online broadcast. (<https://www.catholic.sg>) Following the broadcast of the Mass will help you to receive the Lord spiritually. You can also gather as a family for the Liturgy of the Word by spending time in prayer, reading the Word of God of the Sunday Liturgy and interceding for the world that this Covid-19 virus will be contained and eradicated. Even if you cannot gather together as a family to worship, you should individually spend at least half an hour in quiet time to pray and especially read the Word of God.

For weddings and funerals these are considered private services which means only invited guests can attend. Arrangements will have to be made with the parish priest. All precautionary measures must be taken as per the advice of the Catholic Medical Guild (CMG).

For those who need the sacraments urgently, e.g. Anointing of the Sick and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, please make an appointment with the priests in your parish. Ministers of the sacraments must also take proper precautions when ministering to parishioners.

Finally, please continue to follow the safeguards and precautions that the CMG have issued periodically (<https://coronavirus.catholic.sg>)

Thank you for your patience and understanding. Let us continue to pray for each other, especially those who have succumbed to this illness; and that the Lord will free us from this Covid-19 so that we can continue to worship freely and build up the community in love and service. Pray also for those in the frontlines – the doctors and the nurses – who are putting their own well-being in the service of the sick; that the Lord will protect them and their loved ones from harm.

Yours devotedly in the Lord

Most Rev William Goh
Archbishop of Singapore

Given on the Feast of the Dedication of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd

14 Feb 2020