

January 8, 2021

## Guidelines on Church activities in the time of Covid-19 in the Diocese of Niigata

Dear brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Niigata,

As a result of the spread of Covid-19, the Japanese government issued a declaration of a state of emergency as of January 7 for the four prefectures of Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba and Saitama with a deadline of February 7.

The "Guidelines for the Catholic Church in Japan for Dealing with Infectious Diseases" issued by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan on November 1, 2020 sets the following four levels of alert and indicates countermeasures at each level. (1) When an infectious disease outbreak occurs overseas, (2) When an infectious disease outbreak occurs in Japan, (3) When an infectious disease spreads in Japan, and (4) When an infectious disease continues in Japan. Of these, (3) seems to be the level which reflects the current situation, and the criteria for determining this level is "when an infectious disease is spreading in Japan and the government has declared a state of emergency and has requested refraining from business and movement". In the three prefectures within the Niigata Diocese, no state of emergency has been issued, there is no request for refraining from business, and the government has taken limited measures, requesting voluntary restraint on travel only in areas where the infection has spread. Under these circumstances, I would like to ask everyone in the Diocese of Niigata to continue taking thorough measures to prevent infection in church activities. The measures announced on November 2nd were to be "judged and responded to appropriately according to the situation of each parish". But in light of the current situation, I would like to ask you to comply as much as possible with the measures I announced on November 2. In addition, I would like to inform you of the new measures as follows. The duration for "New measures" no. 2 and no. 3 will be announced before February 7. In addition to the above, please refer to the Guidelines of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan to take measures to prevent infection.

In this difficult time, I want to invite you to practice our faith as a community of Christians. In private prayers and Masses, pray for essential workers, those who are engaged in work that is essential to our social life. And I encourage you to seek new forms of church activities in this difficult time. For example, a parish has created a faith sharing section in their

church bulletin. There are more and more gatherings being held through online services such as Zoom. Various dioceses, parishes, and religious congregations are offering online videos of spirituality and catechism courses. It is also a good idea to post prayers that are appropriate to the current social situation, and words of thanks and encouragement for essential workers on the bulletin board outside the church.

I regret that we have to implement these regulations. As a community of faithful, we will do our utmost to help bring the infection under control as soon as possible. I would like to thank everyone for your understanding and cooperation in our actions to take care of the lives of people. May we treat people with love, so that the dignity of every individual life is respected. I pray for God's blessings and guidance.

Paul Daisuke Narui

Bishop of Niigata

Countermeasures as of November 2, 2020:

1. Avoid crowded places, close-contact settings and confined and enclosed spaces. Wear masks and disinfect hands.
2. Keep a distance of 1.5 to 2 meters from each other in the chapel and other church facilities. If you are unable to keep this distance during Mass in the chapel, hold Mass in a larger room or increase the number of Masses. If you are currently living together, you may sit together.
3. Make sure that the space is well ventilated for indoor gatherings including Mass. During the winter period, it may be difficult to ventilate the space due to the heating system, but try to keep the fresh air flowing.
4. When singing at Mass or other gatherings, try to keep a distance from the congregation and sing alone, or have the choir sing. Avoid singing with the entire congregation.
5. The Sacrament of Confession should not be administered in a small confessional, but in an environment that is not crowded, close-contact settings and confined and enclosed.
6. The collection should be made by each person in a fixed collection box, not by passing around a collection bag.
7. Communion should be received with the hands and not with the tongue.
8. Refrain from using the holy water basin.
9. Sanitize chairs, door knobs, etc.
10. There will be no age restrictions on participation at Masses. However, if you are elderly, have a chronic illness, or are concerned about your health, I ask that you give top priority to protecting your life. If you are absent from the Sunday Mass for these reasons.
11. If you have a fever, cough, sore throat, or loss of sense of taste or smell, refrain from attending Masses.
12. At Masses and other public gatherings, keep a record of the names and contact information of all participants so that we can be prepared for any eventuality. Be careful with the information and dispose of it at a later time.
13. Please consult with the chancery if you are unsure of what to do.

New measures:

1. Do not engage in any activities that could be understood as “close contact”, such as shaking hands or prolonged conversation at close range.
2. For the time being, refrain from gatherings that involve eating and drinking.
3. The obligation to attend Sunday Mass is waived for all members of the Diocese of Niigata. Please give top priority to the protection of life.