

August 23, 2021

**Guidelines on Church Activities
in the Current Situation of the Spread of Covid-19
in the Diocese of Niigata**

Dear brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Niigata,

As you know, the Covid-19 pandemic continues to endanger the lives of people and affect our social life, especially impacting the medical system. In the three prefectures of the Diocese of Niigata, a record number of cases have been reported in recent days. In spite of this situation, there has been no cluster outbreak in our churches so far, and I am grateful for your cooperation in continuing our church activities.

According to recent reports, the original Covid-19 infection in Japan has almost been replaced by the highly infectious Delta variant. Even those who have received two doses of vaccination are still susceptible to infection, even if they do not become seriously ill. There are also reports of clusters of people talking, eating and drinking outdoors without masks, and talking and singing loudly even when wearing masks. I would like to ask that you take these situation changes very seriously and implement the basic measures dated January 8, 2021 even more carefully than before.

Please pay special attention in the following areas

- Avoid crowded places, close-contact settings and confined and enclosed spaces. Wear masks and disinfect hands.
- Avoid singing with the entire congregation, not even one song.
- Open windows and doors for ventilation even if air-conditioning is on.
- Refrain from gatherings that involve eating and drinking.

Akita and Yamagata prefectures are currently urging people to be careful or refrain from traveling across their borders to other prefectures. When you plan church gatherings, please consider the call from your prefecture carefully.

It has become noticeable that the number of infected people is increasing rapidly in some cities in the diocese. If it is necessary to cancel public Masses due to local circumstances, please make that decision at the parish level and inform the chancellor's office.

Let us support each other in prayer, protect our own lives and the lives of others, and continue to work together as a church community in cooperation with one another.

Paul Daisuke Narui, SVD
Bishop of Niigata

Measures as of January 8, 2021:

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 Masses. 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.
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. Do not engage in any activities that could be understood as “close contact”, such as shaking hands or prolonged conversation at close range.
14. For the time being, refrain from gatherings that involve eating and drinking.
15. 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.
16. Please consult with the chancery if you are unsure of what to do.