

September 30, 2021

**Guidelines on Church Activities
in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic
in the Diocese of Niigata**

Dear brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Niigata,

These days, the number of Covid-19 newly infected people have decreased and Covid-19 related indicators such as bed occupancy rate are becoming better throughout Japan. The Japanese government has announced that it will lift the declaration of a state of emergency and preventive measures in all prefectures on September 30. In the three prefectures of the Diocese of Niigata, although the response differs from prefecture to prefecture, the local governments are gradually easing the restrictions while remaining vigilant.

Here in the Niigata Diocese, I would like to inform you that on September 30, we will end the measures that I specifically requested on August 23, and return to our basic measures as of January 8, 2021, according to the situation of each church. It is expected that social life will continue to be affected by Covid-19. As Christians, let us continue to protect ourselves and the people around us as we move forward as a community living the gospel. I thank you for your cooperation.

Due to various reasons at work and at home, there are still people who are unable to attend Masses. We are all connected to each other as a community in the Lord. Let us pray and be creative in supporting each other. Let us also do what we can to help those who are in need.

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.