

Nov. 7, 2022

Church activities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in the Niigata Diocese

Dear brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Niigata,

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

The seventh wave of the Covid-19 that began in July of this year has swept across Japan and has had a tremendous impact on the prefectures of the Niigata Diocese. Furthermore, in the past few weeks, the number of infected people has continued to increase, as if signaling the arrival of the eighth wave. We are grateful for the efforts at parishes, kindergarten schools and nurseries, as well as the elderly-care facilities for taking measures against the infection under these difficult circumstances.

On November 27th, we will begin using the new Mass formula. I am sure that everyone is practicing the new words and hoping to begin the sung Mass with a renewed spirit from the season of Advent. I consulted with an expert about the possibility of easing of measures, and learned that it is too early to do so since the number of infections has not yet settled down. As long as the number of infected people remains at a high level, we will continue to take the same basic measures against the pandemic. However, since the situation differs from place to place and community to community, each parish should be flexible in deciding how to adapt the measures.

It has already been two and a half years and still we do not know when the so-called "post-Covid" period will come. At this time, Japanese society has resumed activities in creative ways and started new forms of initiatives, while adhering to basic infection control measures. In the Diocese of Niigata, Mass has continued and a new form of the Diocesan Assembly was successfully held. Singing at Mass has been adapted to suit each church, with choirs singing from second-floor pews or other areas away from the main congregation. For discussions on the Synod, although it was not possible for everyone to gather together, some parishes formed small groups and held talks over a period of several weeks. In some parishes, socials were held outside the parish hall. I encourage every community to discuss and devise ways to continue church activities in creative ways. Let us continue to walk together in cooperation. May God's blessing and guidance be with you always.

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Bishop of Niigata