

March 20, 2023

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 Covid-19 pandemic that began in 2020 has affected people all over the world and has drastically changed lives. In order to prevent infection and to respond in the event of infection, the Diocese of Niigata has asked for three years that basic measures be followed by each parish and institution according to their circumstances. I sincerely thank you for journeying together through this difficult path, helping and praying for each other.

The Japanese government has announced that like the seasonal influenza, Covid-19 will be reclassified as a category 5 illness, from May 8 of this year. In accordance with this change, the Diocese of Niigata will also change its basic measures, referring to past experiences and the new measures proposed by the government and local authorities. In the event of another outbreak in the future, I ask that you respond to the situation accordingly.

The new measures are found in the next page, and the following two points are the common understanding to implement the measures.

1. Consider measures in each community: Each parish has a different size building, different community members, and different activities. The local situation is also different. Each community should consider and decide how to implement the basic measures.
2. Respect individual judgment: Each faithful has a different circumstance and health condition. The individual judgment should be respected in the parish communities. I ask that parish communities respect the judgment of individuals, especially those who have health concerns.

In addition, the exemption on the obligation to attend Sunday Mass extended to all members of the Diocese will be lifted effective March 26. However, those who have health concerns should put their health as priority.

All parishes in the Diocese of Niigata have cancelled various activities and events during the pandemic, and it may be difficult to start something again that has not been done for three years, or to begin something

new. After Jesus' death on the cross, the disciples were at a loss for hope and purpose. But the two disciples who walked, talked, and ate with the Lord on the road to Emmaus experienced His resurrection, and left for Jerusalem after sunset to tell the other disciples about it as soon as possible. For the past three years we have been walking on a painful and uncertain path, but the Lord has been there with us. And the Lord will continue to walk with us. With the Lord and with people, we would like to carry on with our activities in joy. I pray that Easter this year will be a time of great joy in many ways.

The measures as of March 2023

1. Avoid crowded places, close-contact settings, confined and enclosed spaces, and ventilate the room. Plan your events in a way that people are not too close together.
2. The diocese does not have a common policy on the wearing of masks. Please wear masks at your own discretion. We ask that those who are concerned about their health be considered so that they can participate in church activities such as Mass without being anxious.
3. If you have a fever, sore throat, or other symptoms related to Covid-19, refrain from participating in church activities.
4. The Diocese will not restrict any other activities that have been previously discouraged, such as singing at Mass, meetings involving eating and drinking, etc. Each community shall make their own decision. Please consult with the chancery if you are unsure of what to do.

Paul Daisuke Narui, SVD
Bishop of Niigata