



ZAMBIA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (Z.C.C.B)

CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT

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To: The Clergy, Religious and Catholic Lay Faithful

Cc. The Local Ordinaries

A COMMUNIQUE FROM ZCCB ON PREPAREDNESS FOR THE POSSIBLE OUTBREAK OF CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19)

*“... In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by”
(Psalm 57:2)*

Dear Rev. Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and the esteemed lay faithful,

The World Health Organization (WHO) has escalated the status of the new *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)* from being a public emergency to a Pandemic.

Even though to date we have no confirmed cases in Zambia, we as Church and in consultation with the Ministry of Health in Zambia do hereby request that we take precautionary measures in all our Parishes, Outstations, Church institutions and places where we gather.

A. Health Guidelines

We strongly urge Catholics to cooperate and strictly follow the guidelines that the Ministry of Health and the WHO have given:

- 1) First and foremost, exercise good hygiene practices such as washing your hands with soap thoroughly and regularly to kill viruses that may be on your hands.
- 2) Maintain a distance of more than one (1) metre between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing since when someone coughs or sneezes, they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain the virus.
- 3) Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth as hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses.
- 4) Practice respiratory hygiene by covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze and dispose the used tissue immediately.

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- 5) If you have a fever, cough and experience difficulties in breathing, immediately seek medical care at your nearest health facility.

B. Key Pastoral Guidelines

The Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB) has consulted widely and is committed to follow the health guidelines in the conduct of liturgical rites and celebrations in the medium and long-term. Cognisant of the fact that some African countries have recorded cases of COVID-19 and in view of the possible outbreak in Zambia, ZCCB is taking a proactive approach. We have therefore resolved that:

- 1) We strongly exhort the clergy, Ministers of the Eucharist (Holy Communion) or any extra-ordinary ministers to exercise good hygiene practices during liturgical celebrations such as washing your hands thoroughly before and after the distribution of the Holy Eucharist.
- 2) Where possible, provide hand sanitizers at every entrance to the Church or Sub parishes or Church institution. The faithful should be encouraged to wash their hands with soap before entering Churches or other places of worship.
- 3) Holy water fonts should be drained. Instead, Holy water should be kept at the sacristy where the faithful can collect (it) for their individual use.
- 4) There should be NO physical exchange of the sign of peace during liturgical or para-liturgical celebrations. Thus, any form of a handshake, hug or other bodily contacts during Mass should be discouraged.
- 5) In the interim, the faithful receive Holy Communion on hand as opposed to receiving on the tongue.
- 6) Vulnerable individuals such as those at particular risk by reason of their age or existing health condition, are exempted from the obligation to attend Mass. Nonetheless, the Ordinary and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist are hereby exhorted to take the Blessed Sacrament to such while observing high standards of hygiene and other precautionary measures.
- 7) Concelebrants should NOT all drink from the chalice but receive by intinction and that only the main celebrant drinks from the chalice. In the same vein, the purificator cannot be shared or should at least not be used to wipe one's lips.

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- 8) We encourage any person who may be suffering from any form of fever, cough or cold to voluntarily abstain from Eucharistic and other liturgical celebrations until they recover.
- 9) Public veneration of relics and the Crucifix/Cross such as held on Good Friday should NOT be by kissing or physically touching them.
- 10) Parishes consider reducing the duration liturgical assemblies gather for worship and the community congregates for other religious activities.
- 11) The unnecessary gatherings of large numbers of Christians is avoided and movements of lay groups are henceforth restricted.
- 12) We urge priests, the religious, catechists and lay leaders to preach messages of hope and follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who calmed down the storm and challenged his disciples to be courageous and have strong faith (Mark 4:35-41). While encouraging people to adhere to the stipulated health guidelines, we further urge all members of the Church to be steadfast in their Lenten observance of PRAYER, FASTING and ALMSGIVING (Mt 6:1-18).

We hereby wish to indicate that further updates will be issued by Local Ordinaries (Bishops and Archbishops) in view of dealing with local circumstances and other relevant issues that may arise in the due course. *Whilst hoping for the best, we must prepare for the worst.* In the event that the worst-case scenario unfolds, the Local Ordinaries are resolved to take drastic and necessary measures that will be aimed at saving lives and safeguarding the vulnerable members. This will include the possibility of shutting down our Church premises, if and where deemed necessary. **In the meantime, we exhort all Church institutions to abide by the official directives being issued by government and its line ministries.**

We call upon all to take personal responsibility by protecting yourselves and others, especially those most at risk due to their preexisting medical conditions, our brothers and sisters living with chronic diseases, the aged and other vulnerable members of our communities.

We further entrust those who may be suffering from Coronavirus and all the caregivers to the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We end by recommending this prayer adapted from the one offered by the Holy Father, Pope Francis. It is to be prayed during the Coronavirus crisis.

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O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope.

We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick. At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith.

You, Salvation of all the Peoples, know what we need. We are certain that you will provide for our needs, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee, joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us: He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection.

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin Mary. Amen.

Issued on 17th March 2020 – Memorial of St Patrick, Bishop & Missionary.

Rt. Rev. George Cosmas Zumaire Lungu
Bishop of Chipata
ZCCB PRESIDENT



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