



Archbishop of Palo

Quidquid dixit vobis facete!!!
Do whatever he tells you! Jn 2:5

My dear People of God,

PEACE!

At a time when important elements in life were running out; when life reaches the crossroads of uncertainties, we are reminded of these maternal words of our Lady. Significant things happened for the past couple of months and these have affected the way we live our life. These have significantly altered the public expression of faith. Restrictions in view of stemming the tide of COVID-19 are a welcome endeavor in the Church. Yes, we have closed our churches but we did not stop praying and making the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, available to the faithful through different social media platforms.

We now see an ember that we need to keep burning. Let us fan it with charity and concern for each other; these are concrete expressions of a person who believes in God. Let us convert this ember into a full-blown fire as we go back to celebrate public masses. Yet, let us take a conscious warning that fanning too much might put the light to naught. I understand that there is too much excitement as we have been deprived, for a long time, to celebrate public masses.

Take note that the relaxation of some restrictions does not square with the disappearance of the deadly virus. We are just given a little window. With our due cooperation and proper guidance the window shall be converted into doors and the doors into gates. Let us remain calm and become beacons of patience.

I intend to write you this letter to formally endorse the guidelines for our Archdiocese. We have come up with these in serious and careful considerations of the new normal as indicated by the CBCP and the prescriptions of IATF. Hence this is for strict compliance. However, I also understand that these have to be adapted according to the sensibilities and the resources of the place. You can do some adjustments at the time of adaptation but always bear in mind the essence and substance of the document.

I humbly ask all of you, both the clergy and the laity, not to weary in praying. Experts are doing their part, let us also strive to do our part by being more fervent in faith, steadfast in hope, and overflowing in charity. Let the words of our Lady always inspire for I firmly believe that doing what our Lord tells us to do will afford us a much better tomorrow; something better than our plans.

Let us always pray for each other; let us pray for all those who chose discomfort so that they may save lives. With my paternal blessings, I remain


✠ **MOST REV. JOHN F. DU, D.D.**
Archbishop of Palo





**GENERAL GUIDELINES
FOR LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS IN PARISH CHURCHES (AND CHAPELS)
for THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PALO
IN CONSIDERATION OF THE NEW NORMAL**

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. Liturgies are celebrations of faith. Those baptized have the right to participate in these celebrations. Those who will be refused entry should be provided with an adequate explanation.
2. Liturgical celebrations involve the gathering or assembly of people. However, since any assembly needs to be regulated, it is of paramount importance to follow the regulations in relation to health, age, and physical capabilities. The immuno-compromised and those with respiratory illnesses should be advised not to take part in liturgical gatherings, for the meantime.
3. To accommodate all the faithful who may wish to participate in the Sunday liturgy, the number of masses in a specific church may be increased - on Saturday late afternoon and evening and also during or the whole day of Sunday.
4. Churches and liturgical spaces are primarily venues for the faithful to encounter God and to contemplate His Presence. Hence, order and cleanliness (sanitation) should characterize these sacred places.

II. THE SANITATION OF PLACES OF WORSHIP

1. Church premises, doorknobs and handles, floors, pews and other furnishings should be regularly cleaned and sanitized or disinfected (preferably after every use).
2. Aside from the usual cleaning and sanitation, air-conditioned churches, prayer rooms, and meeting halls should be naturally ventilated especially after each use.
3. Itar furnishings, including liturgical books, vessels, linens, and other liturgical appurtenances should be cleaned after use.
4. Holy water stoups at the entrance of churches should never be used; if possible, during this time they may be stored away for future use.
5. Microphone foam covers should be changed and washed every after use.
6. Entrance doors to the church and sacristy should have provisions for handwashing (soap and water or chlorinated water) and/or hand disinfection (alcohol or hand sanitizers), including disinfecting floor mats.
7. Covered trash bins should be placed in strategic areas, near the church, and even in the sanctuary and the sacristy.
8. Alcohol, sanitizers, thermal scanner(s), face masks/shield, and gloves and disinfectant spray and disinfectant wipes and paper tissues or towels should be readily available.

III. THE PHYSICAL SET-UP INSIDE CHURCHES AND SACRISTIES

1. The sacristy is a place of storage for the liturgical appurtenances and other paraphernalia needed for the liturgical celebration. Depending on the floor area, only the main celebrant should be allowed to stay in the sacristy. Other minor ministers either stay in a waiting area or go directly to their place in the sanctuary or the church.
2. Churches and, if possible, even large chapels, should have a supply of running water. Aside from the mandated sacrarium in the sacristy, all sacristies should have their own water supply for the sanitation of the church and its premises.
3. Following the two-meter-distance rule, designated areas where the faithful can stay during the celebrations should be clearly marked; this goes true for areas for the main celebrant (and the concelebrant, in case there is) and the minor ministers (altar servers, lectors, emhc, altar servers, and choir members).
4. The seating capacity of our churches should be known by all beforehand. In special celebrations, parishes may provide additional places/tents/rooms outside the church to accommodate the faithful but observing the proper protocol for all participants. This extra space/place outside the church may also be used in case of an unforeseen overflowing of participants and for those whom the usher/health minister thinks may not be fit to stay inside.
5. In order to regulate the number of those inside the church, the parish may designate entrance and exit doors (especially in churches with many doors).

IV. DUTIES OF THOSE WHO TAKE PART IN THE CELEBRATION

A. *The Congregation*

1. All who enter the sacristy and the church (clergy and lay) should observe the proper protocol of handwashing or hand-sanitizing and foot sanitation, the wearing of masks and social/physical distancing, and the required protocol. They should readily submit themselves to thermal scanning.
2. Those who participate in church activities should follow the advice of the usher especially in the place where to sit or stay during the celebration.
3. Those inside the church should remain in their designated seats and not loiter around. They can only leave their seats during communion.
4. In special celebrations, persons may be designated to carry the main gifts to the altar; and so, they may leave their assigned seats for the offertory procession. Other offerings (in-kind) should be made known beforehand to the parish priest or whoever is in charge. Monetary offerings inside envelopes should just be dropped in the collection bags.
5. The “Sign of Peace” at mass is done only with a slight bow of the head, even among family members. Handshaking and kissing (beso-beso) are strongly discouraged.
6. Those who would go up to take Holy Communion should never rush to where communion is given, but rather observe physical distancing. They receive communion in the hand only.
7. Children below seven years of age may sit next to their parent or guardian (or any family member); but like everybody, they should wear masks.
8. Everybody must refrain from touching or kissing devotional images and even kissing the hands of the priest (*mano po*).

9. The practice of asking the celebrant (or any minister) to sign a mass attendance card or notebook is suspended, in the meantime.

B. The Ministers

In the performance of their duties, the following ministers should observe the following additional norms (together with those to be observed by the congregation / general public):

1. Main celebrant:

- a. It is preferable that he wears a mask during the entire celebration; however, when conversing with other ministers and giving instructions to them, he should wear a mask.
- b. If possible, he uses a microphone exclusively for his own use.
- c. When offerings are handed to him during the Offertory and Presentation of Gifts, he sanitizes his hands after receiving them and even after the usual washing of hands (lavabo)
- d. He does not uncover the chalice and the ciborium(a) during the Eucharistic Prayer
- e. He consumes all by himself the consecrated big host.
- f. Before giving communion, he shows the consecrated host and says to those present “the Body of Christ,” to which the people answer “Amen.”
- g. He sanitizes his hands before giving communion to the faithful.
- h. In giving communion to the faithful, he should wear a mask; and he gives communion in the hand without saying anything.
- i. After giving communion and before he purifies the chalice and other sacred vessels, he sanitizes his hands.
- j. The minister tasked to purify the chalice and ciboria is the only one who may drink from the chalice; the others (even a main celebrant or a concelebrant) may just take holy communion by intinction.

2. Concelebrant

- a. He wears a mask during the entire celebration
- b. The hosts for him should be entirely covered during the Eucharistic Prayer
- c. He consumes the sacred host intended for him
- d. If he joins in giving communion, he should sanitize his hands before and after the act

3. Sacristan (the person-in-charge of the sacristy)

- a. He wears a face mask all the time\
- b. He sees to it that all the liturgical paraphernalia, including the microphones and furnitures, are cleaned before and after use.
- c. He observes strictly all hygienic practices especially in the preparation of the wine and the handling of hosts for consecration and in placing them inside the ciborium(a).
- d. In handing over the other liturgical paraphernalia to other ministers, it is preferable that he wears gloves.

4. Lector/Commentator

- a. He/she wears a mask all the time, even while reading
- b. It is preferable that he/she brings his/her copy of the readings (Dayaw, Mag-ambahan, etc.), if possible.
- c. It is preferable that only one lector reads at Mass; he/she uses a microphone exclusively for him/her
- d. It is preferable that the commentator if there is, should use his/her own microphone.
- e. If in case another minister (e.g. the psalmist, deacon, or priest) will use the same microphone, the microphone foam cover is changed or the microphone is cleaned (using a disinfectant wipe, at least).

5. Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

- a. He wears a face mask all the time.
- b. He sanitizes his hands before and after giving communion.
- c. He gives communion only at the designated or assigned places.

6. Altar Server

- a. He wears a mask all the time.
- b. He wears clean gloves while serving at mass, especially as he holds the paraphernalia used in the liturgical celebration.
- c. The gloves have to be washed/cleaned after each use.

7. Collector

- a. He/she wears a mask all the time.
- b. He/she wears gloves which should be washed/cleaned after each use.
- c. He/she uses only a collection bag with a long pole when going around to get the offering of the faithful.

8. Choir

- a. Members should wear face masks even while singing, if possible.
- b. Each member sits only at the designated area reserved for him/her.
- c. The choir uses their own microphone; if possible, each member will have his/her own microphone.

9. Usher

- a. He/she wears a mask all the time.
- b. He/she stations himself/herself at the designated entrance to the church.
- c. He/she checks the temperature of those about to enter using a thermal scanner, if available.
- d. He/she documents (puts on record) the identities of those who enter the church.
- e. He/she directs the faithful where to sit and checks the seating arrangement of those who participate.

- f. He/she politely advises someone who can no longer be accommodated inside the church or whom he/she thinks is not fit to get inside to stay in the prepared area outside within the church premises.

V. CONDUCT IN THE CELEBRATION OF OTHER SACRAMENTS, OTHER LITURGIES AND POPULAR DEVOTIONS

1. Baptism

- a. In the meantime, baptism of one child will be the norm, rather than the baptism of a large number of children.
- b. There will be only a maximum of five attendees for each baptism, aside from the minister and the server: the child, both parents and two godparents.
- c. In administering the sacrament, the minister may not touch any part of the child's body; only the parents would be allowed to make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the child.
- d. After the pouring water on the head of the child, the priest uses a paper towel or tissue to wipe extra water on the head; the paper towel should be properly disposed of after use; in anointing with chrism, the priest uses a cotton ball dipped in chrism which should be properly disposed of immediately after each use.
- e. As much as possible, the schedule of baptism should be so spaced out that there would be ample interval from one celebration to another.
- f. In cases when the request for baptism greatly depends on the significance of the day (e.g. feasts) and other considerations (e.g., availability of the priest), baptism of a large number of children may be done; however, the number (of children) allowed will depend on the space or area where the celebration of baptism is held so as to accommodate the need for physical distancing. Paper wipes and cotton balls dipped in chrism should be provided for each child; these will all be disposed of properly immediately after the celebration.
- g. the priest sanitizes his hands before the act of pouring water on the child and after anointing with chrism.
- h. The protocol followed in the celebration of the mass also applies to the celebration of baptism.

2. Confession

- a. Priests should always be available for individual confessions.
- b. Inside the church, confessions should be done using a confessional screen with a white cloth covering the screen for added protection. The priest and penitent however should wear masks.
- c. Outside the church (with no available confessional screen), the priest should wear an additional protective gear – mask and face shield and gloves, if needed.

3. Holy Communion to the Sick (Viaticum)

- a. On Sundays most especially, communion may be given to the elderly and the sick (non-Covid patients) who are prevented from attending the mass and who request holy communion.

- b. The priest or the extraordinary minister of holy communion must observe the proper protocol – face mask and face shield, gloves, etc.
- c. The priest or the extraordinary minister of holy communion sanitizes his hands before and after giving communion.

4. Anointing of the Sick

- a. Priests should administer this sacrament for those who need and request it; however, the priest should wear protective gear – face mask, face shield, and gloves.
- b. In administering the sacrament, the minister (priest) may not touch any part of the person's body; and he may use a cotton ball dipped in the oil (of the sick) which should be properly disposed of after each use.
- c. In hospitals and in Covid quarantine facilities, priests designated by the bishop for this particular ministry (chaplains and pastors under whose jurisdiction the facility belongs) should administer the sacrament, if he is not immuno-compromised himself; in such situations, the priest should coordinate with the hospital (or quarantine facility) administrator and abide by the enforced protocol regarding proper and safe conduct.

5. Weddings

- a. The celebration of the sacrament of matrimony may be allowed; a large entourage is discouraged; and, except for the couple, all others who participate, including the priest, should observe physical distancing.
- b. The rings (of the couple) and the arrhae may just be kept by the groom himself and taken out for the blessing and the exchange of rings and the giving of the arrhae. The other additional explanatory rites, such as the donning of the veil and the cord may be dispensed with for the meantime.
- c. The conduct of those who participate follows the provisions in relation to the participation at Mass.
- d. In the case of two or more couples, the area or place where the celebration takes place should determine the exact number of couples (and other participants) who would be allowed to attend.

6. Funeral

- a. Priests are strongly advised to seek and follow always the recommendation of the LGU and municipal health office regarding the conduct of a funeral.
- b. A limited number, preferably only the immediate family of the deceased, is allowed to participate in the funeral rite (RCD) and funeral masses.
- c. The protocol followed in the celebration of the mass also applies to Funerals.

7. Wake Mass

- a. Wake masses in funeral parlors and private homes may be celebrated. However, similar to funerals, the advice of the LGU (and municipal health office) should be followed; in this case, only the immediate family should be allowed to attend.
- b. The protocol followed in the celebration of the mass in churches and chapels should be strictly followed.

8. Mass for small or exclusive groups / Retreats / Recollections

- a. Religious gatherings (e.g. of small groups, schools, and the like) may be done, but the venue should allow for physical distancing among those who attend.
- b. The protocol for the gathering of a group of people (and even the celebration of Mass) should be strictly observed.

9. Liturgical Celebrations in Open Spaces

- a. Due to the need to accommodate a greater number of people inside a small space, the liturgical celebration may be done in an open space or covered court.
- b. In cases like this the protocol for the gathering of many people – face masks and social distancing, the sanitation protocol, and even documentation of those who participate – should be strictly followed.

10. Other religious activities / Popular Devotions / Blessings

- a. Devotions that are done inside churches (e.g. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction, patronal novena, etc.) may be done; however, those who participate should strictly observe the protocol required of those who enter the church.
- b. Processions, as public manifestations of the faith, may be conducted at appointed times; aside from observing the proper protocol (face mask and physical distancing), these activities should be coordinated with the LGU. In the meantime, a religious motorcade may substitute the traditional procession.
- c. Seasonal religious activities outside the church, such as *Santacruzán*, and similar devotional activities that involve the gathering of people may be done but always in coordination with the LGU; otherwise, these activities may be suspended for the meantime.
- d. House-to-house visitation of patronal or devotional images may be done; however, the religious image and other devotional materials (prayer cards) should be thoroughly disinfected before they are placed inside the home or any enclosed facility.
- e. Parishes should encourage family devotions; in fact, many devotions (prayers) usually held inside the church would better be introduced back into the families.
- f. In blessing items and religious objects, the priest should ask the owner (of the item or religious object) to hold/carry/stand beside the object and to participate in the prayer.

VI. OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS (directly related or allied to the liturgical celebrations)

1. Each parish with the PPC is strongly enjoined to appoint a liaison for church affairs to the LGU in order to coordinate matters on public health and safety.
2. The current health crisis necessitates a much needed attention to the care for the sick and elderly in the parish community. A parish association or committee composed primarily of health workers can assist the parish in this apostolate (or ministry), especially to promote health/stewardship of life, to minister to health workers, and to visit the sick and elderly in the community. In parish celebrations, a team can do the triage together with the ushers (in checking the temperature and in detecting symptoms of illness).

3. The “new normal” situation requires the activation and formation of the Ministry of Ushers in our liturgical services. This group should have formal training in this liturgical ministry. In the meantime, members of existing parish groups or organization - youth, faith communities, and even lay ministers - may be tapped to join this separate and distinct ministry.
4. The parish and mission station may form a distinct apostolate (ministry) whose primary responsibility is to sanitize the church, i.e., to regularly clean and disinfect the church, its furnishings, and even the liturgical appurtenances. They should have the proper training for the job. Likewise altar linens (especially if they are washed outside the rectory) should be disinfected before use.
5. The “new normal” may require a new policy for Concelebrated Masses, i.e., by pre-notification or by invitation only. This is in view of the demands of physical distancing vis-à-vis the venue where the concelebrated mass is held. Such a policy however will not apply to the celebration of the Chrism Mass (which should be participated by all priests in the diocese).
6. The regular celebration of the Mass in chapels will primarily depend on the size of the chapel. If ever, a device could be adapted, e.g. by turns so that a different set of parishioners will come to Church every Sunday.
7. The resumption of Sunday Service at the absence of a priest in barrio chapels will greatly depend upon the discretion of the parish priest, considering the space, the preparation on the part of the chapel itself, and the faithful. In the case of its gradual reintroduction, the same protocol in the celebration of the mass in the parish church or big chapels applies to these services.
8. Adoration and Veneration Chapels may open; however, these places have to be regularly sanitized (if possible, before opening and upon closing). The sanitation protocol when entering the church and the wearing of masks and physical distancing have to be strictly enforced.
9. Regular meetings of parish organizations and groups (regular meetings / prayer groups / BEC family group sharing) may resume; however, the sanitation protocol and the wearing of masks and physical distancing have to be strictly followed. The need for a proper venue to enforce this necessitates a new way of holding meetings, i.e., by using internet chat groups and other similar devices and/or by creating smaller groupings or clusters
10. The parish office must strictly adhere to the protocol – not just in the wearing of masks and physical distancing and the sanitation protocol, but also to the need to have a clear and protective division (e.g. acetate sheet) between those who work in the office and those who have a transaction in the office; the office staff should have a documentation of those who enter the office for some transaction.
11. All monies received in the parish office or in collection bags and boxes should, as much as possible, be disinfected before counting them. The rooms or offices where they are handled need to be regularly sanitized. The same protocol may be relevant in handling other material offerings to the parish, including those received during liturgical celebrations.
12. Parish Rectories, residences of a community of priests (seminaries and formation houses) and convents for the religious, being the residential area of priests and religious assigned there and of those who attend to them, should be exclusive for residents/workers only. Among residents, the protocol of wearing face masks and physical distancing may be relaxed, similar to that in a family setting. However, guests and other visitors should abide by the protocol of handwashing or hand sanitation, face masks, and social distancing.

13. Offices catering to other apostolates or ministries, including the social services of the church, may remain open. But they have to adhere strictly to the protocol in their transactions with other people.
14. It is recommended that Masses celebrated for the community (parish or barrio) should be broadcasted via loud speakers (trompa) for those in the environs to hear and somehow participate (especially those prevented from attending).
15. As much as possible, one daily Mass and one Sunday mass may be shared via live streaming for those who are prevented from going to church. A group of parishes (within a district or vicariate) may take turns in handling this media apostolate. The same goes true for catechetical lessons and retreat sessions shared via the internet (social media).
16. Each parish and mission station should have an updated parish profile in the website of the Archdiocese of Palo and an official Facebook Page which could help in the dissemination of the parish information and schedule, the live streaming of masses and other liturgies, the acceptance of mass intentions and even other donations intended for the parish. However, this should be handled professionally and should always be under the strict supervision of the parish priest.