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PASTORAL LETTER

Resumption of Sacramental Life in Phase 3

Dearest Clergy, religious and brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings of peace and love from our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are grateful to Almighty God for the many blessings and graces that we have experienced these past few weeks. We have seen a considerable decline in the number of new Covid 19 cases and zero mortality. Many Catholics would have been relieved to return to their churches to celebrate Mass and receive the Lord in the Eucharist. Our social economic life is slowly emerging from the doldrums and inertia brought on by several months of lockdown. And our schools are reopening for our children to return in a safe manner.

But even as we have many reasons to celebrate, we are reminded by the public health authorities that we are not entirely out of the woods and we must continue to responsibly exercise prudence and caution whilst placing our faith and trust in God.

I know that many of you are excited at being able to return to church in the shortest time and be part of the Eucharistic assembly but you need to be patient as we wish to take a gradual approach to allow everyone to return to Church in a safe manner, in order to avoid a resurgence of this pandemic and to protect our most vulnerable members.

Several media outlets had reported that the Honourable Senior Minister, Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri, on behalf of the Majlis Keselamatan Negara (MKN), announced yesterday that “there will no longer be a limit as to how many people can attend a conference, social gathering or prayers in mosques or places of worship starting July 15.” (The Star, 10 July 2020)

The above report needs to be qualified and clarified, in the light of the original speech of the Honourable Senior Minister. The context of the above report is a decision to resolve the discrepancy between the SOP for social gatherings (which limits participation to 250 persons) and the SOP for places of worship (limits attendance to one third of the total seating capacity). The decision taken was to standardise both sets of SOPs by lifting the restrictions on number of participants and seating capacity. But it is important to note that the restriction of requiring one metre social distancing remains in force.

For the above reasons, the reduced capacity of our churches, chapels and Mass centres has not changed. In short, the announcement has no impact on our current arrangement and Catholics are still required to follow the guidelines set by the different parishes in the selection of who gets to attend Mass on Sunday. The method of selection and registration varies from parish to parish.

I wish to congratulate the various parishes and volunteers under the guidance of your respective priests in reopening your parishes in a safe way and in compliance with the governmental SOPs and the Archdiocesan Guidelines. Different parishes are working on different timelines as they move from Phase 1 to Phase 2 of the reopening exercise.

Several parishes have decided that they are ready to move into Phase 3, where there will be an increase of number of Masses over weekends. I would like to reiterate that the Parish Response Teams of these parishes have an obligation to conduct a comprehensive review of the implementation of the protocols and determine that the Parish and the various teams of volunteers are trained and ready to cater to the increased frequency of Masses and number of participants before moving into Phase 3. Remember to complete and submit the Reporting Template to the Archdiocese before proceeding to the next Phase.

Other parishes have decided to continue with one public Mass per week as prescribed under Phase 2. I would like to encourage each of these parishes to reach out to as many Catholics possible, who are eligible and willing to attend the weekly Masses. I do understand that due to the single Mass allowed for each Sunday, the limited seating capacity, and restrictions imposed by the authority, many would not be able to attend Mass on a weekly basis. Please remember that for those who are unable to attend Mass on a Sunday, you are dispensed from the obligation until it is possible for you to return in a more regular fashion.

For the parishes who are deciding to move into Phase 3, I would like to lay down some additional guidelines:

1.0 Age Restriction

Under the latest MKN SOP on places of worship dated 24th June 2020 (which is subject to further review and amendments), seniors and children are not encouraged to attend services in places of worship. This is a public health advisory and not an absolute prohibition. Due to the higher risk, the Archdiocesan policy continues to discourage those falling under these categories from attending public Masses. If you are planning to attend Mass even if you fall under these categories, please consult your family members and physician and weigh the risks for yourself and others, before deciding to come for Mass.

2.0 Non Malaysian Citizens

Due to the restriction imposed by the MKN SOP dated 24th June 2020, non Malaysian citizens are still not permitted to attend public Masses.

3.0 Infant Baptisms

Infant baptisms may be conducted in the church according to the Archdiocesan Guidelines but this is to take place outside public Masses. Only one child with his or her family and sponsor is allowed at any baptism (unless other children are from a single household/family).

4.0 Sacrament of Confirmation (Catechism)

I will resume the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation for catechism students in the parishes. I would like to request that parishes contact Ms Anne Francis to confirm the date of their celebration. Due to the limited seating capacity, such celebrations should be held outside the scheduled public Masses of the parish. The guest list should be limited to the parents of the candidate and the sponsor. The Parish Priest may, however, exercise his discretion in determining the number of attendees based on the seating capacity of the church.

5.0 Marriages and Funerals

Currently under the MKN SOP, only 20 persons are allowed at a wedding and 15 persons at a funeral. Please also check your respective state health regulations. The SOPs are reviewed and updated from time to time.

6.0 Sacraments of Initiation (RCIA)

Parish Priests should make arrangements for the elect in their respective parishes to receive the Sacraments of Initiation under Phase 3. These Sacraments should be celebrated outside the scheduled public Masses of the parish and number of invited guests should be limited to seating capacity.

7.0 Home Communion

Due to a sharp increase in the number of persons who are ineligible to attend a public Mass or who have chosen not to attend Mass for various reasons, and given the wide differences between parishes in terms of size and resources, it would not be possible to lay down a common policy for home communion.

I would like each Parish Priest to reach out to your communion ministers to discuss the criteria of selection and manner of distribution of Holy Communion to those who are unable to come. Please ensure that you adhere strictly to public health precautions and not put anyone in unnecessary risk. The Archdiocese will disseminate a report on the latest survey conducted among the clergy to assist you in your deliberations and decision making.

8.0. Sunday School, RCIA, Meetings (Parish/ BEC)

In-person classes, meetings and gatherings are still not allowed until further notice.

As the various parishes move through the different phases of reopening, I would like to ask all of you to be patient. It is unfair and uncharitable to compare one parish with the other. There is no room for rivalry or competition in the Church. We must remember that every parish is unique in terms of its needs, size and resources and therefore, each parish may make decisions which differ from the other due to particular circumstances. Ultimately, all parishes of the Archdiocese are moving together to restore our churches and chapels as centres of spiritual, pastoral and sacramental life and we wish to do this safely and prudently.

As our country slowly recovers from the effects of this pandemic, let us continue to pray for the people of other countries who are still battling this disease and suffering from the effects of the lockdowns. On our part, we must not let our face masks down, but we should remember to wear them whenever we are in the public. Pursuant to public health advisories, we should always practice social distancing and keep ourselves and our surroundings clean.

May God bless all of you and your loved ones. Stay safe and stay holy.

Yours affectionately,



+ Most Reverend Julian Leow Beng Kim
Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur

