



Catholic Archdiocese of Accra

4th February 2021

**To Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful
of the Archdiocese of Accra**

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

PUBLIC WORSHIP IN THE ERA OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Peace of the Lord be with you.

Introduction

On Sunday, 31st January, 2021, the President of the Republic of Ghana updated the nation on the rising number of the cases of COVID-19 and gave some directives on how to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The new variant of the virus is said to be more deadly. Consequently, at a meeting held on 4th February, 2021, I discussed the address of the President with my College of Consultors. In the light of the menacing situation posed by the coronavirus, I wish to urge all Catholics in the Archdiocese of Accra to observe religiously the following directives.

A. EXISTING DIRECTIVES

I wish to remind all priests, religious and laity to adhere to the existing directives stated in my previous pastoral letters on the COVID-19 pandemic, especially, the following:

1. Disinfection and Fumigation

Pastors together with their Parish Pastoral Councils are reminded to ensure that churches are disinfected after each use. Also, the churches and their surroundings should be fumigated on regular basis.

2. Parish COVID-19 Team

Each parish/church must have a COVID-19 Team to guide, advise and accompany parishioners throughout the pandemic period. The Team should comprise of medical experts and persons with some technical knowledge to help in handling the pandemic. They are to work with the Parish Priest to ensure adherence to the safety measures.

3. COVID-19 Protocols

The COVID-19 protocols must be strictly adhered to. Therefore, there should be provisions of handwashing facilities and hand sanitizers. Also, all priests, religious and the laity must wear their face-masks all the time before, during and after Masses, and their temperatures must be taken before the Masses. In the church, sitting arrangements should be done in accordance with the prescribed social distancing of one (1) metre.

I wish to remind priests to ensure that Sacristans, Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist as well as the Knights and Ladies of the Altar strictly observe the protocols, especially, by washing or sanitizing their hands before carrying any items from the sacristy to the sanctuary or from the sanctuary to the altar. The number of Knights and Ladies serving at a time should be minimal to allow for proper social distancing. Also, the handling of Communion “hosts” and wine should be the preserve of the priests themselves; and these species should not be carried by the lay faithful during the offertory procession.

4. Duration of Liturgical Celebrations

The maximum duration for Holy Masses and other liturgical celebrations is two (2) hours. Furthermore, in view of the fact that on Sundays the crowds in our parishes are great, I wish to discourage the meeting of societies and groups on that day. Such meetings at the church premises could be held on other days or they could be done online.

5. Additional or Anticipatory Sunday Masses

In view of observing strict social distancing at Masses, I wish to reiterate that the permission for priests to offer anticipatory Sunday Masses on Saturday evenings is still valid. Also, each priest has my permission to celebrate two Masses on weekdays and three Masses on Sundays (cf. Canon 905). Masses can be celebrated concurrently in the church and at the grotto or in

the parish hall at any given time. Whereas Masses could be celebrated at the grottos, processions with rosaries at the grottos are still banned until further notice.

6. Live Streaming of Masses and Teachings

I encourage parishes to continue with the online streaming of Holy Masses and catechesis for the aged, homebound and those who, for some other reasons, are unable to congregate physically. Other teachings (e.g. during Children Week, Youth Week, Laity Week, etc.) could also be done online.

B. NEW DIRECTIVES

Here are some new directives which I enjoin all priests, religious and lay faithful to strictly adhere to:

7. Weddings and Funerals

Outside the Lenten Season, the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony can be celebrated in the church observing all the required protocols, including the registration of attendees. However, in accordance with the directive of the President of the Republic, wedding parties and merrymaking gatherings after the Mass are banned. Similarly, whereas the funeral Mass could be celebrated, all funeral gatherings after Mass are banned. Moreover, there shall be only private burials at the cemetery with a maximum of twenty-five (25) people. It should, therefore, be emphasized that parish/church halls or compounds are strictly not allowed for wedding parties and funeral gatherings. Furthermore, in order to restrict the number of people who attend the Masses of Holy Matrimony and funerals, there shall be no extra sitting arrangements (under canopies) outside the church building on such occasions.

8. Revivals, Crusades and Pilgrimages

Certain large gatherings have the propensity to make people flout the COVID-19 protocols. In this light, revivals, crusades, and group pilgrimages are banned until further notice.

9. Ash Wednesday

The Congregation for the Divine Worship (Rome) has given some guidelines regarding the distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday. These guidelines should be adopted and adapted to ensure that there is NO contact between the priest and the faithful receiving the ashes. In this

respect, two options are hereby recommended for adoption in a parish/church: (a) the priest, wearing his face-mask, sprinkles a pinch of ashes on the forehead of the faithful in silence; or (b) the priest, wearing his face-mask, uses a new disposal spoon to distribute the ashes in silence while the faithful receive it in their left palms and sign themselves with their right hands. In this latter case, the distribution of ashes should be done post-communion.

10. **Catechism**

With the resumption of schools, catechism lessons in the designated classes are encouraged, provided all the required protocols can be observed. However, in the parishes, the resumption of catechism classes may depend on each parochial circumstance. Even where it is adjudged appropriate to resume catechism lessons, only children of ages ten (10) years and above may attend the classes, and only after the children and their parents have been given the required orientation and the protocols put in place.

Conclusion

Beloved, even though the above directives are addressed mainly to our parishes/churches, they apply also to our schools and other institutions. Let us all strictly adhere to the above and other COVID-19 prevention directives for the sake of our health, as well as the health of our families, friends, communities and the nation as a whole. Finally, while thanking you for your sustained efforts in the past months during this pandemic, I encourage you to earnestly pray for the end to the COVID-19 pandemic so that we return to our regular liturgical life. May Mary, the Mother of the afflicted, intercede for us.

Yours Paternally,

+ John B. Kwofie

Most Rev. John Bonaventure Kwofie, CSSp.

Metropolitan Archbishop of Accra

