

CHANCERY NOTICE

PASTORAL MEASURES IN CONNECTION WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

I. Diocesan Emergency Pastoral measures

The Covid-19 pandemic is getting worse, with the number of confirmed cases globally approaching 500,000, and the death toll exceeding 20,000, and a large number of newly confirmed cases every day. A week ago, a lot of our local residents began to return to Hong Kong from abroad because of the grim situation of the pandemic in other countries and the inadequate medical care available there. This mass return has led to a sudden surge in the number of locally confirmed cases (now more than 450 totally) over the past few days, and among them are those notable cases involving no symptoms or identifiable sources of infection. Repeatedly the SAR government and the health care sector have strongly urged the public to keep social distancing, avoid social gatherings and stay at home as far as possible. The government and many organizations have allowed their staff to work at home. The government is also enforcing drastic lockdown and quarantine measures, as well as more and more restrictions on the use of public places, so as to minimize the risk of an outbreak at community level.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about a global economic recession. As for Hong Kong, unemployment and livelihood are posing many problems, while various sectors of society (such as schools) are under unprecedented impacts. In some countries, a dire shortage of health care staff and medical resources in countering the pandemic has brought the health care system to the point of collapse. Large groups of patients (including many elderly) are unattended and left to die on the street.

For the sake of the common good, the Holy See and overseas Church authorities have given support to the stringent emergency measures of civil authorities and have accordingly suspended all public Masses and communal activities.

Taking into account the critical situation of the pandemic both locally and globally, Cardinal John Tong, after consulting the Council of Priests, the Deaneries and health care professionals, has decided that the following emergency pastoral measures (nn. 1 – 3) are to continue to take effect until further notice:

1. Parishes and affiliated chapels are to suspend all public weekday and Sunday Masses, as well as other forms of communal religious activities, with the exception of weddings and funerals.
2. The faithful may choose one of the following alternatives to attending Sunday Mass:
 - (a) Taking part in a Sunday Mass online (e.g., through the diocesan website www.catholic.org.hk and the facebook link of *Sunday Examiner* <https://www.facebook.com/Sunday-Examiner-609821205700415/>) and receiving Holy Communion spiritually; *OR*
 - (b) Reflecting on the Sunday liturgical text, reading the Bible or saying the Rosary, etc.

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3. Parochial churches and affiliated chapels remain open for personal prayers, Way of the Cross performed individually, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the regular exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.
4. Parish clergy will continue to provide the usual pastoral services (hearing confessions, exposing the Blessed Sacrament, visiting the sick and bringing them Holy Communion, etc.)
5. Holy Week Liturgy —
 - (a) Parishes will not hold the usual public Holy Week Liturgy this year.
 - (b) Basing on the Decrees “*In time of Covid-19*” (I) and (II) promulgated by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on 19 and 25 March 2020 respectively, the Diocesan Liturgy Commission will be sending guidelines to parishes to help them to make special arrangements for the Holy Week Liturgy.
 - (c) Cardinal John Tong will officiate at the Chrism Mass to be held on Holy Thursday (April 9). (Participated only by the members of the Diocesan Curia and the Deans who will distribute the newly consecrated holy oil to the affiliated parishes.)
 - (d) The faithful can watch online the Holy Week Liturgy (by visiting diocesan website: www.catholic.org.hk and the facebook link of *Sunday Examiner* <https://www.facebook.com/Sunday-Examiner-609821205700415/>).
 - (e) Good Friday (April 10): All faithful who have completed their 14th year are to abstain from meat. Those who have completed their 18th year but have not yet begun their 60th year are also obliged to fast.

II. Special Indulgences granted to the faithful under the current Covid-19 pandemic

With the whole of humanity being threatened by the Covid-19 (Novel Coronavirus Infection) pandemic, the Apostolic Penitentiary, on the authority of Pope Francis, has announced that it is granting plenary indulgences to the faithful who, each in his/her own way suffering from the pandemic, bear this painful experience in a spirit of personal conversion and thereby rediscover this experience as “the same redemptive suffering of Christ” (St. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 30). In addition, these faithful have to meet the following requirements —

1. Basic Conditions:

Apart from a complete detachment from any sin, the three usual conditions for acquiring a plenary indulgence are: (i) sacramental confession, (ii) Eucharistic communion and (iii) prayer (in any form) according to the Holy Father’s intentions [*These conditions, made more flexible in view of the pandemic, are to be fulfilled as soon as possible; see also 2.4 below*].

2. Works of Piety or Charity:

These works or services are performed by the faithful in the following four situations:

2.1 The faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals, quarantine centres, or in their own homes if, they unite

spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sister.

- 2.2 Health care workers, family members and all those who, following the example of the Good Samaritan and making an act of supreme love by risking their own lives” (cf. *Jn* 15:13) to care for patients afflicted with the pandemic.
- 2.3 Those faithful who pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or take part in an Eucharistic adoration, or read the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour, or recite the Holy Rosary, or perform the Way of the Cross, or recite the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, at the same time imploring from Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to Himself.
- 2.4 Those who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of the *Viaticum*: the Church, by virtue of the communion of saints, entrusts them to divine Mercy and will grant them a *Plenary Indulgence* on the point of death, provided that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime (in this case the Church makes up for the three usual conditions required). For the attainment of this indulgence, the use of the crucifix or the cross is recommended.

III. Some Clarifications on the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Apostolic Penitentiary, in a Note appended to its Decree of March 19 this year, has made some clarifications on the Sacrament of Reconciliation in connection with the pandemic (please refer to the website of the Vatican:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/tribunals/apost_penit/documents/rc_trib_appen_doc_20200319_nota-speciali-indulgenze_zh_tw.pdf), of which the following three relevant for our Diocese:

1. During the pandemic outbreak, a priest might feel the need to impart sacramental absolution to several faithful together, without individual confessions. In our Diocese, such a priest must consult either Cardinal John TONG or Bishop Joseph HA, OFM, before taking action.
2. During the pandemic outbreak, even if the faithful are impeded temporarily from taking part in the sacrament of reconciliation, they can rest assured that a genuine desire for receiving that sacrament, together with prayers and works of penance and charity, fulfils the obligation of repentance.
3. If a member of the faithful is in danger of death but no priest is available to hear his/her confession, by making an act of “perfect contrition” (arising from a love by which God is loved above all else), he/she can obtain remission of venial sins; such a contrition also obtains forgiveness of grave (mortal) sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible (*Catechumen of the Catholic Church, 1452*).

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The diocesan pastoral measures mentioned above are adopted out of expediency, by force of circumstances. They will certainly cause some inconveniences and we will have to make some sacrifices. It is the expectation of Cardinal John TONG that we will bear all these burdens with patience and charity for the sake of the common good. Furthermore, the Cardinal is asking us to pray for those infected and their families, and especially for the health care workers who have been working round the clock, at the risk of their own lives. Lastly, in a spirit of solidarity, we are encouraged to lend material and spiritual support to other members of society in containing the pandemic.

Given at the Chancery Office,
27 March 2020.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lawrence Lee".

Rev. Lawrence LEE
Chancellor