



FURTHER ZCBC STATEMENT ON COVID-19
24 March 2020

To: The Clergy, Religious and the Faithful

Re: Further Pastoral Guidelines Regarding the Coronavirus Pandemic

Introduction:

Further to the pastoral guidelines we issued on 17 March 2020 to curb the spread of the coronavirus and taking into account ongoing addresses to the nation on Covid-19 by President E. D. Mnagagwa and directives from the Ministry of Health and Government, we hereby issue additional pastoral directives for observance by all Clergy, Religious and the Faithful in Zimbabwe. It is essential to obey both civil and ecclesial authorities as the Covid-19 pandemic wreaks havoc around the globe. The most effective witness we can give is first of all a serene and committed obedience to what is demanded by those who govern us, both at the state and ecclesial level, to all that is disposed to safeguard our health, both as private citizens and as a nation. It's happened before. Plagues and viruses have been with us since the dawn of humanity, with the only difference that whereas past plagues tended to be regional, COVID-19 is global. The world is increasingly becoming a global village, with its advantages and disadvantages.

Like past generations we also share the sense of panic and powerlessness epidemics evoke. The challenge to us all, particularly Christians, is how we respond to it. In the mid-14th Century, the bubonic plague spread from Asia into Europe. An estimated 40% of Europeans died over the course of a few years. One hundred years ago, the global Spanish Influenza killed roughly 50 million people. These are two of many examples in history. The same history recounts how our species has learnt to cope with and survive epidemics and pandemics. Medical science has advanced since the 14th and early 20th Centuries. Many formerly fatal illnesses are now controllable or curable. All that's needed is time, research – and human willingness to comply with basic measures (notably hygiene and avoidance of contamination) to prevent the spread of diseases. Where there was resistance, more people died. Where they complied, the death rate was lower.

1. ZCBC Resolution:

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, so many aspects of our lives must change in order to keep each other safe and save lives. This includes the ways in which we publicly express our faith, as explained in our earlier statement of 17 March 2020. We have, therefore, further resolved as a Conference to close all Catholic Churches for public liturgical services and Church related gatherings with immediate effect on this 24 day of March 2020, until further notice, to allow for effective self-isolation for all. This will mean that all of us will have to stay and pray at home, including sharing the Sacred Scriptures and saying the Rosary individually and as a family. Our obedience in this time of crisis is an act of charity.

All Priests should, however, continue to celebrate Mass in their Parishes without a congregation on a daily basis. The continuing celebration of Mass ensures that the faithful can join in spiritual communion with the priests of the Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states (1364): *As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out.* Knowing that Mass is being

celebrated; joining in spiritually in that celebration; watching the live-streaming of the Mass where possible; following its prayers; making an act of spiritual communion: this is how we will share in the Sacrifice of Christ in these days. These are the ways in which we will sanctify Sunday, and indeed every day. We want everyone to understand that in these emergency circumstances, and for as long as they last, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is removed. This is in line with the teaching of the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2181). This pandemic is the 'serious reason' why the Sunday obligation does not apply at this time. Nevertheless, even while we are at home during these disturbing and threatening times, the rhythm of the prayer of the Church will continue. Please play your part in it. The effort of daily kindness and mutual support for all will continue and increase. Please play your part in this too.

Religious communities, as experience in other countries shows, the daily community life exposes you to greater risk and needs additional attention in applying preventive measures and acting properly at all times.

2. Anointing of the Sick

Some cases of coronavirus have now been reported in Zimbabwe. No pastoral visits should be made to people who are self-isolating until the isolation period ends. However, do offer phone support. When anointing the sick, the Oil of the Sick can be applied using a cotton bud which can be burned afterwards (one end for the head and the other for the hands) and the priest extends his hands over the sick person for laying on of hands, without physical contact. This has been confirmed as a valid mode of celebrating the sacraments which involve "laying on of hands." Visits to people in care homes or hospitals should follow advice from the staff on infection control.

Please exercise caution should you need to administer any other sacraments at this time.

4. Funerals

There will be deaths. Let us leave burials to close family members and associates, even for clergy and religious, in this season of the pandemic, which we pray will be short.

Conclusion:

Let us continue to unite and pray fervently for a speedy end to this pandemic, for the recovery of those infected and for the repose of the souls of those who have died as a result of this pandemic. In these tough times, we must focus on a loving God who cares for humanity and our well-being. A God who works through the many health care professionals and medical researchers, who even now, are working to end the COVID-19 outbreak. We should spend our enforced Sundays and days at home praying for them.

God Bless You All

+Robert C. Ndlovu, Archbishop of Harare

(ZCBC President)

+Alex Thomas, Archbishop of Bulawayo

(ZCBC Vice President)

+Paul Horan, Bishop of Mutare

(ZCBC Secretary/Treasurer)

+Michael D. Bhasera, Bishop of Masvingo & Apostolic Administrator of Gweru

+Albert Serrano, Bishop of Hwange

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