

Diocese of Takamatsu

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Guidelines to be carried about by the diocese for “Church Management under the conditions of the novel corona virus pandemic.”

+ Peace be with you.

The novel corona virus pandemic continues and there does not seem to be any prospect that it will end soon. The Catholic Diocese of Takamatsu Advisory Board held a meeting and requested a set of “guidelines for the Diocese of Takamatsu.” Therefore we wish to inform you of the current guidelines in a separate document. The basic understanding of the diocese is as follows:

1. The pandemic will not be over soon, even if vaccinations begin.
2. Even those who seem healthy may be infected.
3. There are many elderly people in the church, and once the infection begins, the damage will be great.
4. Due to the nature of the church, it is inevitable that people such as travelers from other prefectures will come and go.
5. Pastors have no choice but to interact with many people as part of their duty, even though they know the risks. However, if infected, there will be a great number of obstacles to deal with, as far as pastoral and parish management.
6. Since the sea separates Shikoku from Honshu, there is not as much of an influx of people to the area. However, there have already been community-acquired infections, and we should not underestimate the potential for a serious outbreak. It is necessary to follow the instructions issued by the local government in areas that are taking infection control measures.
7. The main infection route is droplets from the air that are expelled and breathed in. So, it is important to avoid singing and loud voices. Masks should also be worn. Hand sanitizer is an effective method to reduce the contamination of objects which have been soiled by droplets falling on them.
8. Focus should be on taking common sense measures, and there is no need to be afraid.
9. Participation in the liturgy and the sacraments is not necessary or urgent. For those who are afraid of illness, or tend to be nervous about the situation, a break will reduce excessive stress and help prevent infection.

On November 10, 2020, the Catholic Bishops’ Council of Japan issued the English version of the “Guidelines for the Catholic Church in Japan for dealing with Infectious Diseases.” (ref: <https://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/2020/11/10/21468/>)

This guideline does not match the actual situation in the Diocese of Takamatsu due to the current conditions of the novel corona virus pandemic. So, the guidelines for our diocese are as below:

1. The pastor of each parish council will ultimately decide what measures will be taken, based on the opinions of the parish council. If necessary, please contact the office of the diocese.
2. If the numbers of participants are small, and you can avoid 1) closed areas, 2) densely packed areas, and 3) being too close to others, Mass and other church activities can be carried out, if it is a small parish. Even in that case, be sure to wear masks, refrain from using holy water fonts, and use hand sanitizer to avoid infection.
3. There are some cases where it is difficult for pastors to explain things to foreigners. Sometimes the explanation is not enough. The pastor of each parish should keep this in mind. Since many people are isolated in their daily lives, they tend to crowd together at church and become too close, and share meals. But, this can be a dangerous situation.
4. Please refrain from singing in mid-sized or large churches. If possible, only play the music on the organ. Standing, and only having a single cantor sing the songs and responses is an option.
5. Collections are not to be taken during the Mass, but only a donation box should be prepared for use before or after Mass.
6. The bread and wine offering should not be presented to the priest. It should be prepared beforehand and set on the table for priest to consecrate.
7. The holy instruments that hold the body of Christ should be covered, as an infection control measure. Since only the celebrant will partake in the blood of Christ, the chalice does not need to be covered.
8. Please refrain from taking Holy Communion by mouth unless absolutely necessary. If necessary, people taking Holy Communion by mouth should be the last people to be served.
9. Please do not return the paper Missal at the back of the Church. Please carry it home with you.
10. Please feel free to visit your church at any time during the week when it is not crowded, for Eucharistic adoration or to pray. Please contact the pastor of your church to arrange times for the sacrament of reconciliation that is convenient for you.
11. Each church should devise a plan to pay for church maintenance fees.
12. We understand that foreigners who are living here inevitably lack information. Moreover, for those who are speech-impaired, they also lack information. Please share this information with others as much as possible. Also, remember that in principle, parties and dinners are prohibited, since we cannot keep the guidelines set forth by the government.