



THE TITULAR ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOP OF PENANG DIOCESE OF PENANG

Catholic Diocesan Centre

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Dear Clergy, Religious, Heads of Ministries and the Lay Faithful,

Re: Reopening of Churches, Chapels, Mass Centres for Public Worship and Guidelines in the Diocese of Penang

Greetings of Joy, Mercy and Hope!

The Federal Government had announced on 15th June 2020, that all places of worships within the green zones, will now be allowed to resume religious activities during the period of the Recovery Movement Control Order which is effective until 31st August 2020.

Having said that, the permission is subject to compliance with the requirements set out in the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) issued by the Ministry of National Unity (MNU) and National Security Council (NSC), for Non-Muslim Places of Worship as stated below:-

- The number of attendees at any service is limited to one third of the capacity of the place of worship following the measurement of the churches, chapels, and mass centres.
- Parishioners who are exhibiting symptoms like fever, cough, respiratory issues and cold are not allowed to participate. Parishioners who have diabetes, cancer and other health issues are not encouraged to attend.
- Parishioners who are 70 years and above; and children who are 12 years and below are not permitted to attend. This restriction does not apply to the priest-celebrant.
- All attendees are to undergo temperature scanning and registration before entering the place of worship. The SOP requires all attendees to download the MySejahtera application which is compulsory. Parishes will also need to conduct manual registration for the purpose of contact listing and tracing.
- The various places of worship would still be subject to additional conditions imposed by the State authorities. (Please check with your respective states).

Supplementing the above requirements, the Diocese of Penang will follow the attached guidelines, adapted from the Guidelines for Celebration of Sacraments under the RMCO and post-RMCO period dated 15th June 2020 issued by the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. To assist parishes in preparing and implementing safety measures for the reopening of churches, chapels and mass centres, a four-phase approach is proposed in the guidelines.

PHASE 1

- Setting up the Parish Response Team (PRT)
- Planning, preparation, signages, procuring equipment.
- Recruitment and Training of Volunteers (Cleaning, Wardens, Temperature Scan and Registration, Liturgy).
- Consultation with Parish Councils to determine criteria of selection for Mass attendance.
- No public Masses.
- Anointing of the Sick and Confession (by appointment).
- Funeral service in home and parlours – limit to 15 pax.



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PHASE 2

- One Public Mass per week on Friday/Sunday (the first Mass should not be earlier than 28th June 2020).
- Testing, fine-tuning and gradual implementation of SOP and Guidelines.
- Funerals in Church.
- Anointing of the Sick and Infant baptisms at home (by appointment).
- Confessions before Mass can resume.

PHASE 3

- Additional Masses over weekends.
- Funerals, Weddings, Baptisms of Adults (including RCIA Members of the Elect) and Confirmation in Church.

PHASE 4

- Daily Masses may resume.

The duration of each of the above phases is to be determined by the Parish Priest provided that the first public Mass under Phase 2 should not be earlier than 28th June 2020 and provided that the requirements of the Guidelines and the SOP are complied with.

I would encourage the Vicar Generals and Deans of Northern Region, Perak and Penang Island to assist the priests and parishes in the respective deaneries if assistance is requested for the smooth preparation and implementation of these guidelines. Please use the guidelines as a reference and make the necessary implementations according to the situation in the parishes. These guidelines will be reviewed and updated when required.

I remind my fellow Catholics that the Eucharist is indeed the source and summit of Christian life and should always be our priority, however, it is also the priority and responsibility of the Church to ensure that Catholics can return to church in a safe manner in accordance with all the recommended public health advisories.

Due to the gradual and limited resumption of public celebration of Masses and restrictions imposed on attendance, please note that I will continue to dispense all the faithful from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. I would also encourage parishes to live stream the Masses for the spiritual benefit of those who are unable to attend Mass.

“Do not be afraid” (John 14:27). “Cast your nets into the deep” (Luke 5:4)

I wish you God’s blessings as we embark on this new journey with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

“Be Disciples of Hope”

Sincerely in Christ,

Rt. Rev. Sebastian Francis
Bishop of Penang

