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PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF MALAYSIA IN VIEW OF THE EXTENSION OF THE MOVEMENT CONTROL ORDER

To the Clergy, consecrated persons and lay faithful,

We trust that all of you have been praying hard that this pandemic which has afflicted the entire world and has brought so many disruptions into our daily lives would finally be contained and brought under control. It appears that the battle has just begun and just as the Christian life is not a single event but an entire life's struggle, we too must soldier on as we do our part to mitigate the spread of this infection, avoid further fatalities and prevent it from overwhelming our health care system.

As your Pastors we want to assure you of our closeness to you during these challenging times. We urge the parishes, the different ministries and the BECs to be present and to reach out to all, especially the most vulnerable around us, whoever they may be. Although we may not be able to physically comfort you, you are close to our hearts.

As our Prime Minister had announced today, the period of restricted movement under the Movement Control Order (MCO) has been extended to the 14th of April 2020. This extension unavoidably coincides with the holiest season in our Church's liturgical Calendar, Holy Week.

In view of the restrictions placed under the extension of the MCO and the prohibitions of public gatherings, we the arch/bishops of the three archdioceses and six dioceses of Malaysia, hereby decree that the liturgical celebrations until the 14th of April 2020, including that of Holy Week, will be done without the congregation by the priests of the various arch/dioceses.

In conjunction with the decree issued by the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments dated 19th March 2020, the Catholic Bishops of Malaysia has agreed to adopt the liturgical norms set out in the Appendix.

Dear People of God, although you have been patiently waiting and praying for a resolution to this present crisis, we humbly ask you to wait a little longer. Let us continue to plead for God's mercy, make reparation for our sins and ask for His intervention, not only for ourselves but also those who have been affected by this pandemic, the frontline health professionals and security personnel and all those who continue to ensure that our essential services and supply lines are open and available. On this Solemnity of the Annunciation, let us learn from Mary to trust in God's Providence.

Lent is a season which challenges us to die to ourselves so that we may live in the glory of the Resurrection. As this Sunday's gospel reading speaks of Our Lord Jesus Christ raising Lazarus from death, let us not fall into the embrace of despair, let us resist the darkness of hopelessness as we fall back on the One who has conquered death by His Death, the One who assures us, "I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live." (John 11:25)

On behalf of the Archbishops and Bishops of the Conference, I would like to wish you a blessed Holy Week.

Given this day on the 25th of March 2020 in the year of the Lord, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.



Julian Leow

**+ Most Reverend Julian Leow Beng Kim
President
Catholic Bishops Conference of Malaysia**

+ Most Reverend Simon Poh, Archbishop of Kuching

+ Most Reverend John Wong, Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu

+ Rt Reverend Bernard Paul, Bishop of Malacca-Johore

+ Rt Reverend Cornelius Piong, Bishop of Keningau

+ Rt Reverend Sebastian Francis, Bishop of Penang

+ Rt Reverend Julius Dusin Gitom, Bishop of Sandakan

+ Rt Reverend Joseph Hii, Bishop of Sibu

+ Rt Reverend Richard Ng, Bishop of Miri

APPENDIX

Liturgical and Pastoral Norms for the Celebration of Holy Week

A) The date of Easter remains on the 12th of April 2020 this year. As clarified by the decree of the Vatican, this date cannot be changed because this feast is “at the heart of the entire liturgical year.”

B) The Chrism Mass, where the holy oils are blessed and where priests renew their priestly promises, will be moved to a later date which will be announced at the end of this restriction period.

C) Palm Sunday: there is no need for blessing of palms or a procession.

D) Holy Thursday: Parish Priest can celebrate the evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper without the traditional Washing of Feet nor the procession of the Blessed Sacrament to the Place of Repose. The faculty to celebrate Mass without the people, is granted in an exceptional manner to all priests. The Blessed Sacrament is to be reposed in the Tabernacle. Communities of consecrated persons and laity are encouraged to observe common prayer in their respective houses and homes, which may include praying the Divine Office or the rosary together. Members of Religious Houses or families may wash each other’s feet.

E) Good Friday: In the Cathedral and parish churches, the Bishop or Parish Priest will celebrate the Passion of the Lord. In the Universal Prayer, there should be a special intention for the sick, the dead, for those who feel lost or dismayed (cf Missale Romanum, pag.314 n. 13). According to local circumstances, the priest may privately venerate the cross and receive holy communion.

F) Easter Vigil: The Lucenarium, the Lighting of Fire and Preparation of Candle are to be omitted. The Paschal Candle is lit, the procession is omitted and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) follows. The “Liturgy of the Word” then takes place. For the “Baptismal Liturgy”, the “Renewal of Baptismal Promises” alone is necessary. (cf. Missale Romanum, pg. 371, n. 55). The “Liturgy of the Eucharist” then follows. Those who have absolutely no possibility of uniting themselves to the Paschal Vigil celebrated in a church should pray the Office of Readings for Easter Sunday.

G) Baptisms and confirmation of adults, which were scheduled for Easter, are to be postponed to a later date.

H) The Laity are encouraged to pray the Divine Office and avail themselves of devotions of popular piety - praying the Way of the Cross, fasting, making spiritual communion, praying the Divine Mercy Novena etc during this period.

I) The various arch/dioceses will continue to provide daily live streamed masses as long as this is possible. The priests are also encouraged to connect with their people through the use of online conferencing applications, social media and other online resources, if this is available. The Social Communications Ministry of the various arch/dioceses are prepared to provide assistance to parishes, ministries and priests.