



# UGANDA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

(UGANDA CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT)

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## **GUIDANCE BY THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF UGANDA ON THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As you already know, the novel Coronavirus, COVID-19, outbreak that started in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, has spread to many countries, including some in East Africa. The virus is infectious, meaning it can spread directly or indirectly from one person to another. Its spread is through the mucosal membranes of the nose, mouth and eyes, then spreading down to the throat, airways and lungs. The virus may contaminate the hand when one touches any surface already contaminated by the virus. The Coronavirus can survive up to 8-10 hours on porous surfaces such as paper, untreated wood, cardboard, sponge, and fabric, and a little longer on non-porous surfaces such as glass, plastic, metal, and varnished wood.

We are cognizant of the fact that the virus is spread essentially through droplets which may come out of the nose or mouth and enter the mouth, nose or eyes of other people who are close to the infected person. Because of this, the virus is easily spread.

Globally, as of today, there are about 200,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus with more than 8,000 deaths. More than one hundred forty (140) countries are already affected. In Africa, cases have been confirmed in 28 countries, including Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini [Swaziland],

Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, and United Republic of Tanzania.

The mortality from coronavirus is reported to be as low as 2-3%. But due to the rapid spread, this rate can rise. Currently, there is no antiviral drug that is confirmed to directly act against COVID-19. Moreover the supportive treatment in our facilities may not be as good as in developed countries, especially where Intensive Care Unit (ICU) may be required for severe infections.

The Ministry of Health has provided guidance on how to prevent infection and spread of the virus. It has also given the "COVID-19 Guidelines on Safe Mass Gatherings". The country is also guided on 16 countries which should consider postponing non-essential travels to Uganda, namely, China, South Korea, Italy, San Marino, Iran, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, USA, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Austria and Malaysia. Similarly any person, including Ugandans, arriving in Uganda from those countries will have to undergo self-quarantine for 14 days at own cost even if they do not exhibit signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

The President of the Republic of Uganda, His Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, has reaffirmed the guidelines of the Ministry of Health and issued further orders to strengthen them. They include ban on religious gatherings such as prayers in churches, mosques, open air, and services on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. This takes immediate effect. He has also directed all schools, tertiary institutions and universities [including our Seminaries], to close by mid-day 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The ban will remain in effect for 32 days from 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2020.

In light of the above, we the Catholic Bishops of Uganda (Uganda Episcopal Conference), aware of our duty and obligation to safeguard the health of the faithful, embrace the guidelines issued by the Government of Uganda. Accordingly, we provide the

following guidance to our flock involved in any liturgical and other spiritual activities:

1. Bishops and all the clergy should make the directives from the President and the guidelines from Ministry of Health widely available to the faithful. This can be done during homilies, distributing printed copies of the Guidelines, and using local Catholic radios and any other media.
2. We advise the Priests, Catechists, extraordinary ministers for Holy Communion, and Altar Servers to thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water before and after liturgical celebrations.
3. Where possible, provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers or hand washing facilities with soap at the entrance of the Church for all in-coming members of the church to wash before entering the church and at exit. The recommended sanitizer should have above 60% alcohol, although higher concentration of up to 80% is preferred.
4. Ensure that all Holy Water fonts at the entrance of some churches remain empty.
5. Church buildings should have windows open during celebrations to allow adequate light and aeration.
6. Suspend all handshakes and hugs during Holy Mass and other liturgical celebrations until the pandemic is over.
7. Holy Communion should be given in the hands of the faithful.
8. Ministers should thoroughly wash hands with sanitizers before and after distribution of Holy Communion.
9. Where concelebration takes place, concelebrants [clergy] should communicate by intinction and only the main celebrant or any other priest should consume the Precious Blood of Christ last.

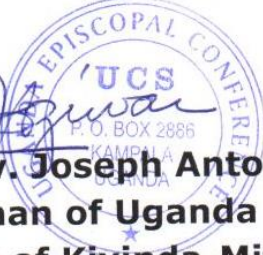

10. Care and prudence be observed in administering Sacraments and Sacramentals.
11. All persons, clergy and laity, who may have symptoms of flu and cough should avoid going to public gatherings, including the Holy Mass, and have themselves checked promptly. We encourage the faithful to quickly enable such persons to reach the nearest health facility as quickly and safely as possible. Such persons should, however, not be discriminated against or stigmatized but treated with dignity and love of Christ (Mt 25:36ff).
12. Since public gatherings are banned, we urge our clergy, religious, catechists, and laity to refrain from conducting the Stations of the Cross, crusades, workshops and retreats of more than 10 people. Furthermore, they are instructed to limit funeral rites to close relatives, administration of the sacrament of Matrimony, for those who cannot wait, to no more than 10 people, with celebrations postponed to a later date (after expiry of the 32 – day moratorium). Such gatherings encourage close contact which may facilitate infections from one person to another.
13. We dispense the faithful from the Sunday obligation to participate in the Holy Mass during this period; however, we encourage all Catholic radio stations to relay and broadcast Holy Mass on Sundays and week days. The faithful are advised to tune in at given times which are to be announced by the same radio stations. The faithful are also strongly encouraged to pray at their homes.
14. Further guidance will be provided for the Holy Week celebrations; Holy Thursday, Chrism Mass, Holy Friday and Holy Saturday [Triduum].

15. Avoid spreading unsubstantiated information or rumours. Always cross-check any information about Coronavirus and other diseases with health experts, Ministry of Health, and the website of World Health Organization (WHO).
16. We greatly appreciate the sacrifice and commitment made by health workers and we want to assure them of our constant prayer and encouragement. We appeal to all the faithful to do the same.

We entrust our country to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Martyrs of Uganda. We pray that the pandemic does not affect more people. In a special way, we condole with the families and relatives of those who have lost their loved ones to the disease, and ask the Almighty God to grant recovery to the sick and quick solution to the pandemic.

During this Lenten Season, let us intensify our prayers, fasting, and works of charity asking God to grant us his mercy and love. In addition to the prayer of Pope Francis, we invite the Faithful to recite at least one \_ of the Rosary every day praying for the end of the Pandemic.

Yours in Christ our Saviour,



**Rt. Rev. Joseph Antony Zziwa**  
**Chairman of Uganda Episcopal Conference and**  
**Bishop of Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese**

*19<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (the Feast day of Saint Joseph)*  
At UGANDA CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT - NSAMBYA - KAMPALA