



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA

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## **CORONA VIRUS TIME FOR CAUTION, NOT PANIC**

The reality of the fast-spreading Corona Virus undoubtedly calls for cooperation by everybody in order to curtail the rampaging nature of the disease. As a Church, we shall follow the directives of the State authorities in curbing the spread of the virus. This will inevitably affect the practices of our faith. Aware of the sacred responsibilities of our faith and practices, we hasten to urge cooperation with the government concerning the welfare of the citizenry. Therefore, we urge all Catholics and people of goodwill to cooperate in the observance of the adjustments we shall make regarding our liturgies. We also recommend Local Ordinaries to give directives in their jurisdictions in the context of their specific social experience. We, therefore, recommend adjustments in the following:

### **Pastoral Considerations**

- We recommend the closure of all Catholic schools, from the university to primary levels until we gain some control over the spread of the disease.
- We encourage smaller units of congregational assemblies. The faithful are encouraged to continue with private devotions.
- We urge parishes to suspend the Sign of Peace, which involves hand-shaking and hugging.
- Reception of Holy Communion should be done in such a way as to prevent touching of the recipient.
- Pastoral care and the Sacraments are to be administered with utmost precautions (use hand sanitiser before and after, and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water often).
- Communal holy water use at church entrances should be discouraged for now. Fountains are preferable.
- Burials should be restricted to only the close family members of the deceased.
- Weddings and social celebrations should be suspended until the situation comes under control



- Prayers and spiritual exercises to be provided in line with Catholic pastoral guidelines.
- Chaplains are to be identified and communicated to the faithful where they live or work.
- Catholic hospitals, conference centres and pastoral homes to institute Emergency Response Measures (Committee, personal protective equipment including hand sanitisers, face masks, hand washing fonts with liquid soap dispensers, temperature monitors, etc.).
- Diocesan Health Coordinators are to provide information on available local support systems (telephone numbers of the state response centres, hotlines for persons in doubt or need, a centre of care for identified cases, etc.).
- Catholic health workers are to be engaged for accurate information and professional counselling.

Finally, once again, we appeal to us all, to recall the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who said: *Do not be afraid: Trust in God and trust in me* (Jn. 14:1). We have been encouraged to respect the social distance, but we must stand together in heart, mind and spirit. These times call for us to reach out to the deepest in our store of human kindness. Good neighbourliness comes natural to us. Let us not lose this wonderful gift in these trying times.

We appeal to all our Priests to ensure that adequate care is taken to ensure that lines of communication are open to ensure that the poor and the vulnerable who live alone are not abandoned. Standing together, hand in hand, God will see us through all this.

With prayerful best wishes in this trying time, I am,

Yours fraternally,



**Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze**  
**Archbishop of Benin-City**  
**President, CBCN.**