

**ARCHDIOCESE
OF
GOA AND DAMAN**

PATRIARCHATE OF THE EAST INDIES

CP-Cir/125/2020

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Circular Letter

To the Clergy ministering in the Churches and Chapels of this Archdiocese

On Resuming Masses with a Congregation

Dearly Beloved,

In our Circular Letter CP-Cir/13/2020, dated 19th March 2020, we had advised the Faithful not to attend Mass “as a precautionary measure against a possible onslaught of the pandemic in our midst.” Priests were, however, to celebrate Mass without a congregation and remain in contact with their Faithful, being always in the front line to offer spiritual and other help to their flock.

On 24th June 2020, through our Circular CP-Cir/69/2020, keeping the recommendations of the civil authorities in mind, we had appealed to our Priests to gradually reopen the places of worship, after seeking the necessary permission and following the safety protocols and other liturgical instructions.

We are happy to note that, till date, 91 Parish Churches, besides several other places of worship, have begun Masses with a congregation, albeit small. This is certainly a matter of joy! However, a good number of Priests in charge of Churches/Chapels are still to ask permission and begin services for their Faithful who are longing to go to Church and participate in the liturgical celebrations, particularly the Holy Eucharist.

During his Mass at Santa Marta on 17th April, 2020, **Pope Francis advised against making the Church and Sacraments virtual.** He was reflecting about the Faithful not being able to come together as a community to celebrate Mass or to receive the Sacraments. Indeed, we cannot be Church without living as a community that gathers physically around the altar and partakes of the Sacraments. Mere spiritual unity is not sufficient; we do not become Church by living as individuals and ‘celebrating’ our community only online. It is true that, after the first fright caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, a whole unprepared world was taken by surprise; however, it is now time to return to being a Church that gathers concretely as an assembled community, even though in small numbers. While people in general are returning to their daily chores and business, frequenting market places and travelling by public transport, we cannot afford to remain as an ‘online community,’ for fear of contamination.

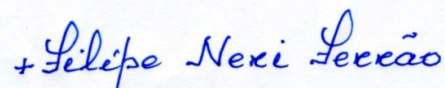
Having taken note of the genuine joy that the process of the resumption of Masses in our Churches and Chapels has brought to our Faithful and heeding the various requests from our Faithful that community Masses should be resumed, we urge you hereby, dearly beloved Brothers in the Priesthood, not to delay further the reopening of those Churches and Chapels that are still closed, so as to help our Faithful to return to the active reception of the Sacraments.

We enjoin, therefore, all the concerned Priests to commence the necessary procedures without further delay and seek the required permission, so that **all Churches and Chapels with officially appointed Chaplains in our Archdiocese may resume communitarian liturgical services latest by the 15th of November, 2020**, observing the prescribed norms and cautions. Due attention should be paid that all the Faithful, including those considered vulnerable by reason of age or illness, are given an opportunity to take part in the Mass, provided adequate care is taken, even to the extent of having specially arranged celebrations.

I am reminded at this moment of our own Goan brother Priest, St. Joseph Vaz, who shone through his undaunted courage and Christian charity when he and his collaborators exposed themselves to contamination while they cared for the victims of a deadly small pox plague that was ravaging the kingdom of Kandy. Besides plain fulfilment of the Lord's commandment of Love, this was an act of true heroism that led the king of Kandy – who himself had abandoned his people – to remark that “had it not been for Fr. Vaz, the Sovereign of Kandy would scarce have had a subject left in his capital!”

May our Christian charity and sense of pastoral responsibility rise to such standards and impel us to reopen the doors of our places of worship to our Faithful. May Mary, our Blessed Mother, who gathered the Apostles together in the Cenacle, inspire us to gather our flock once again as a living and concrete assembled community.

Archbishop's House, Panjim, Goa, 24th October, 2020.



(+ Filipe Neri Ferrão)
Archbishop of Goa and Daman