

My dear Fathers,

Warm greetings to you as we prepare for the Feast of Pentecost. Lockdown 4 is about to end but the rising number of Covid-19 cases in the area of the Archdiocese does not give hope for any quick relaxation of restrictions.

1. In my last video message, I had given some directives for the administration of Sacraments. It is gratifying that many have used the facilities given while observing the prescribed restrictions. I had hoped to announce further relaxations to help our people receive pastoral care more easily. But the most recent Circular from Government has made no further concessions. Hence the last directives remain unchanged.
2. June is the month of our annual transfers. Because of the extended lockdown due to the pandemic, there will be no general transfers of priests on June 1, 2020. Only a few necessary changes will be announced. Hence all our diocesan priests will remain in their present posting at least till November 30, 2020. I encourage all our priests, each one of you to please concentrate on relief work as a priority without being disturbed by any change of personnel.
3. An important change which I intended to announce at our Clergy meeting in March, but which was cancelled due to the lock down, concerns our Finance office. Fr. Sunder Albuquerque is very successfully completing two terms as Financial Administrator of the Archdiocese. After due consultation, I am appointing Mr. Mario Nazareth a long-time member of our Archdiocesan Finance Committee, as Financial Administrator of the Archdiocese. Mr. Mario Nazareth, who is also the Director of our Cathedral Choir, has just completed an illustrious tenure with the Mahindra group – during which he has been in the forefront of Governance. Mario also has the unique distinction of having been conferred the highest Awards of Excellence by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India. He will assume office at the end of the Lockdown. I want to place on record the Archdiocese's and my personal gratefulness to Fr. Sunder Albuquerque for his efficient and dedicated service. Fr. Sunder moved in at a difficult moment as Msgr. Stany unexpectedly passed away. He has put systems in place for good financial administration in the Archdiocese. I am confident that Mario Nazareth will keep up the tradition and further improve our financial management.
4. I have been reviewing the financial position of the Archdiocese with our experts. Our income has dropped to almost Nil: there have been some individual donations, mainly for relief work. I foresee that the existing situation of our Churches being closed, and later on restriction on the numbers attending Church Services, will continue for at least several months. On the other hand, there is some unavoidable expenditure: maintenance of our institutions and payment of salaries to Church employees. The number of parishes seeking a subsidy may also increase. Besides I foresee that there will be an added demand for works of charity due to the effects of the lockdown and the pandemic. We should not arrive at a situation where the Archdiocese has no funds for essentials, and we are compelled to start making larger cuts. Hence we need to tighten our belts already now.

After several rounds of discussion with knowledgeable people and a thorough examination of all options, it has been decided as follows:

The Lockdown which began on March 25th will have lasted for 68 days on May 31, 2020. Full salaries were paid for the months of March and April. For May too our Church employees will receive the full salary but are asked to surrender 21 days of their Privilege Leave.

Those who had to come to work in May because they were providing essential services, will not be asked to surrender their leave.

If the lockdown continues in June, we will give further directions with regards to the salaries. The situation will be reviewed regularly: we need to balance our income and expenditure.

Further because of the financial crisis, there is to be no new recruitment of personnel. Those retiring are not to be replaced. I am sending a Circular with all these details. In case you need any clarification, you can contact Fr. Avin Franklin.

5. To you Fathers: I am urging all our priests to contribute their annual holiday allowance to the relief efforts. My Circular will have details of how you can make this contribution to the Centre for Social Action. The CSA has been doing excellent work and I congratulate Fr. Mario Mendes for his leadership in this pandemic. As of now the Archdiocese of Bombay has helped over 75,000 families. Our work with those affected is continuing with renewed enthusiasm. Our medical involvement has also been much. Sr. Beena of Holy Family Hospital has been coordinating this. Our Crisis Management Team meets regularly to review the situation and give guidance.

Together with my team of Bishops, I wish each one of you a very happy feast of Pentecost. I once again urge you to take all the necessary personal precautions: wearing of a mask, social distancing, and a frequent washing of hands. I expect to get back to you soon with a further advisory after the Government clarifies the situation post lockdown 4. In the meantime, we continue to pray for each other. The Holy Spirit will strengthen you personally, your parishes, and all of us in the Archdiocese of Bombay. On Pentecost Day at 12 Noon all Christians in the country will unitedly pray to the Holy Spirit to rescue us from the pandemic. Do join in. Thank you and God Bless.

With affectionate regards,

✠ Oswald Cardinal Gracias
Archbishop of Bombay

May 28, 2020