

ARCHDIOCESE
OF
LINGAYEN-DAGUPAN

November 16, 2020
St. Margaret of Scotland

ALD Circular 2020-39
RE: *Simbang Gabi*

Reverend Fathers:

Throughout the months of the quarantine due to Covid19, you have tried your very best to be shepherds of our parishioners using new methods and exploring new approaches to bring the blessings of God to a people “*walking in darkness*”. For your pastoral creativity and dedication, I commend you and thank God for you.

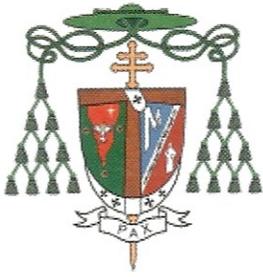
We pray and hope firmly that the worst of the pandemic is truly behind us now. God has blessed us with His gracious protection as we patiently did what scientists advised us to do to stem its transmission, which is the wearing of face masks, maintaining physical distance from one another and observing hand hygiene. We must continue this twofold remedy—prayer and observance of health protocols. It is both a civic and religious duty.

Our people need the Lord. With the rapid changes in the recent months, our people need an anchor to stay healthy in body and mind. The centuries old *simbang gabi* tradition is one such anchor. Let us avail of the *simbang gabi* to lift up the drooping spirits of our people; not in the sense of a superficial partying, but through a true renewal and appreciation of the things that really endure. Faith and its popular expressions are anchors to which our people cling to in times of crisis.

Observing the wearing of face protection, distancing and hygiene, we shall celebrate *simbang gabi*. The *simbang gabi* is not an excuse to relax our precautions.

1. With *simbang gabi* 2020, we open the five hundredth anniversary jubilee of the first Mass and the first baptism in the Philippines due to be observed in March 2021.
This also marks our fourth year of the DECADE OF COMMUNIO in preparation for the centenary of the Diocese of Lingayen due to be celebrated in 2028. Our theme for 2021 is *Dayew tan Pisasalamat*.
2. Our theme for *simbang gabi* 2020 is “ONLY BY THE MERCY OF GOD” (*Lapud panangasi na Dios labat! Dahil lamang sa awa ng Diyos*) which is a quotation from San Carlos Borromeo at the end of the plague in Milan by Christmas 1577. When asked why Milan was spared from the great loss, the saint said: “*Not by our prudence, which was caught asleep. Not by science of the doctors who could not discover the sources of the contagion, much less a cure. Not by the*

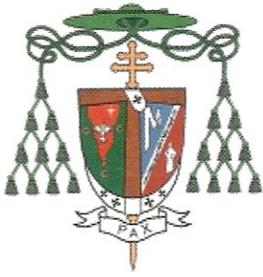
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*care of those in authority who abandoned the city. No, my dear children, but **only by the mercy of God.***”

3. We can start the dawn *simbang gabi* **anytime between** 4:00am until 5:30 am. The anticipated *simbang gabi* may be started as **early as** 6:00 pm. In the anticipated *simbang gabi*, the presidential prayers and readings of the following day may be used except on December 20 when the Masses both at dawn and evening must be the fourth Sunday of Advent.
4. If the parish has nearby big open air gymnasiums, please consider celebrating *simbang gabi* in such venues where there is better air circulation and the space may allow more people to attend properly distanced.
5. As the resources and facilities of the parish allow, the Masses may be livestreamed for the sake of the bedridden and homebound.
6. There may be a musical instrumentalist and maximum of **two lead cantors** for the Masses, according to the festive spirit of the season. A large choir, as we have been used to, might become a venue to spread droplets and cause infection. Let us celebrate without being imprudent and carefree.
7. Owing to the extraordinary situation, I am granting all the diocesan and religious priests within our jurisdiction permission to celebrate three Masses each day of the *simbang gabi* novena.
8. In solidarity with those who are grieving and those who are sick, all Christmas parties this year must be cancelled and the money allocated for the party given to the poor. Within the Christmas novena, please invite the faithful to **offer food and goods** that will be given to the **poor** on a day to be called *Agew na Panangasi* **before** the solemnity of Christmas.
9. The parish must choose at **least three days** within the *simbang gabi* novena to bring, at the most opportune time of the day, Holy Communion outside the Mass to the **elderly, the bedridden and the homebound** so that they can receive the blessings of this happy season. This must be previously announced and the community leaders duly organized so that the people may be prepared to receive the Lord reverently. Parishes with hospitals within the area must offer this same privilege.
10. At the most convenient time on December 15, the parish, chaplaincy or pastoral station will organize a motorcade around the community. The families are advised to bring out of their homes their Christmas trees and nativity images for the priests to bless them. *The Prayers to Bless Christmas Trees and Nativity Images* is enclosed. The purpose is to bring the blessings of Christmas closer to the basic communities beyond the traditional parish *centro*.



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11. On the Mass on Christmas midnight and day, the faithful are encouraged to bring to Mass their images of the Santo Nino or the Child Jesus in the Crib for blessing after Mass. There will be no kissing of the image of the Infant Christ as is customarily done on Christmas in adherence to health protocols.
12. Before December 8, you will receive homily guides for *simbang gabi* to assist you in this ministry of the Word.
13. As mandated by the Second Synod of Lingayen Dagupan, the *Parol na Panamasabi* shall be offered as an inculturated alternative to the advent wreath. (Chapter VI, Article 42)

We are crossing a threshold in history. The past is behind us but the new future is still waiting to unfold. We, called by the Lord to be priests, must be the wise and caring companions of God's people from glory to glory always and only by the mercy of God.

Sincerely yours,

+SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan