

## **PHILIPPINE FBO FORUM: A Call for Solidarity in Prayer and in Action**

*"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail."  
(Lamentations 3:19-22 NIV)*

We enter the Holy Week with sorrow, suffering, and sacrifice, not only spiritually, which our Christian faith moves us to do, but as actual, physical experiences. Remembering Our Lord's passion has become a daily reality particularly among our sick, poor, or vulnerable families whose experience of hunger, thirst, desperation, and pain calls us to solidarity, mercy and compassion. It is when we are almost empty that we must bring out generosity to those who have less in life.

### **Our Holy Week Practices This Year**

Our firm and genuine commitment to cooperate with the government's quarantine regulations may hinder us from fulfilling our traditional practices that have enriched our faith for years. Many will spend days of silence or engage in online services. But we know that these are privileges that only a few can avail.

Instead of processions, our people walk under the heat of the sun looking for food and demanding for their rights. Instead of reciting the *Pasyon* or singing aloud hymns and praise songs, our people express their pain on the streets and in the social media. Instead of *Visita Iglesia*, our people visit neighborhoods and back alleys distributing food and extending kindness, and in the process encounter the Eucharist in the faces of God's people.

Great crisis offers greater opportunities to share in the sufferings of the poor and service of all people, as followers of Jesus. We see these as opportunities to deepen our faith in God and our love for this country and its people. But we also see this as a mission to give a voice to our silent, suffering, and socially-disconnected majority. We are called to raise their voices on their behalf, and as a community of faithful, allow this crisis to bring us closer as members of the human family.

### **Our Prayers to God and Our Plea to the Government**

Thus, in this Holy Week in quarantine, while we enjoin everyone to a time of deep reflection and reconciliation, we also include in our prayers to God and in our plea to government authorities these petitions to ensure that all essential dimensions of flattening this epidemic curve must include:



1. Cohesive Medical and Health Strategies, such as:

- a. *providing adequate resources and equipment towards quality care and treatment of patients particularly those with moderate to severe symptoms, such as increasing ICU capacities of hospitals, providing more ventilators, among others.*
- b. *integrated support to medical frontliners including PPEs, food, accommodations, transportation, and increased hazard pays. We also ask government to ensure that a set of secondliners are hired and trained to take over the current batch to give them time to rest and recover.*
- c. *mass testing of frontliners, PUIs and PUMs by increasing testing centers and personnel, and providing more budget for testing kits.*
- d. *establishment of centralized quarantine facilities to decongest our hospitals without increasing the risk of community transmission.*
- e. *proper, dignified, and culturally-sensitive protocols for the management of dead bodies.*

2. Comprehensive Support to Vulnerable Families in Quarantine, such as:

- a. *stronger support to our community frontliners particularly the Barangay Health Emergency Response Teams (BHERT).*
- b. *faster, transparent and more efficient release of cash grants from Social Amelioration Fund and DOLE CAMP.*
- c. *targeting families whose poverty hinder them from having access to these forms and requirements by doing house to house visits.*
- d. *magnanimity and consideration to quarantine and curfew offenders especially the first timers.*
- e. *community or police protection against domestic violence against women and children and other vulnerable members.*
- f. *constant monitoring for prisoners in crowded jails and correctional facilities, provision of specific health-care requirements of women prisoners, inmates with disabilities and juvenile detainees, and release of 'older detainees and those who are sick, among them – as well as low-risk offenders' as advised by the UN.*

3. Coherent planning and centralized incident command in the governance, such as:

- a. *visible national command center that coordinates all efforts, including those from the civil society organizations.*
- b. *efficient data management that will help LGUs decide whether to extend the ECQ or not.*
- c. *massive education campaign at the community level that persuades larger population.*
- d. *cascading of economic recovery plan that supports particularly small businesses and local markets.*
- e. *providing clear guidelines for the CSOs, including the faith-based organizations, in doing humanitarian mission.*

## **Our Invitation to Fasting and Abstinence**

Physical distancing should not divide us. Isolation should not bring indifference. Crisis should not conquer us.

Thus, we implore our general population to make this Holy Week an occasion to connect to God and to connect with one another. Among other things, we encourage our people to fast and abstain from:

- a. *spreading fake news that will confuse an already suffering country.*
- b. *taking advantage of this situation to further disenfranchise the poor from aid.*
- c. *engaging in any conversation that divides rather than unites our people. Criticisms are necessary to promote balance and democracy, but this can be done in a manner that enlightens rather than insults people.*

While doing this, we encourage our churches to be compassionate to the needy, to be in solidarity with those who are greatly affected by this health crisis, and to pray unceasingly that the world will surpass all this.

In this Holy Week, our churches will be empty. But like the empty tomb of Jesus after His resurrection, this means that our Gospel of Life is proclaimed and present among God's people in their neighborhoods and in their homes.

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (1 Peter 1:3)*



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