

## ICRC DELEGATION TO THE PHILIPPINES

# GUIDELINES ON MANAGEMENT OF THE DEAD WITH COVID-19 FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH

### DEAR BISHOPS, PRIESTS, NUNS, DEACONS, AND CHRISTIAN FELLOWS/REPRESENTATIVES

The Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to the Philippines has provided support to the Government of the Philippines along with both governmental and non-governmental agencies in all efforts and cooperation to handle and to manage COVID-19.

ICRC extends its gratitude and appreciation to religious leaders, traditional customs leaders and community leaders who have actively participated in delivering important messages related to COVID-19 guidelines on management of the dead for Christian burials.

To clarify some of the key messages that have been circulated, below is the summary of information related to Management of the Dead with COVID-19 which we compiled based on references from authorities, international agencies, Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, and the recommendations from the ICRC Forensic Unit. This message is disseminated in order to uphold human dignity, for the benefit of both the living and the dead.

## MANAGEMENT OF THE DEAD

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is prudent to consider that unless proven negative, all deceased may pose a Covid-19 infection risk. The proceeding of funeral rites requires all dead bodies to be treated as if they are COVID-19 positive and considered to be contagious. Therefore, the handling of the dead should follow government regulations and medical protocols.
- All staff engaged in handling the dead should be suitably trained and apply the universal, standard and transmission-based precautions at all times (hand hygiene, environmental cleaning) including appropriate use of PPE; long sleeved impermeable gown, non-sterile nitrile gloves, face shield or goggles, respirator and shoe cover/standard rubber boots.
- If the deceased is already clothed, do not undress them. Wrap the body with a clean cloth and place it in a leak proof body bag that is intended for infectious disease. If none is available, use two regular impermeable body bags.
- The body bag shall be zipped and closed tightly with tapes and bandage strips with proper labelling for identification. Biohazard information such as positive/suspected to COVID-19 should also be noted.
- The outside surface of the body bag should be decontaminated (with hypochlorite solution, standard decontamination solution, or any hospital approved disinfectant) prior to transfer and placement in a sealed casket.
- Hygienic preparations such as embalming, hair and nail trimming and other personal ablutions is not recommended. Follow government recommendation regarding family visits and viewings at the Funeral Home or Hospital mortuary. Once sealed, the coffin is disinfected before being taken directly to the burial site or crematorium.

While waiting at the hospital, the family member or Church officer who accompanies the bereaved family must follow government guidelines and wear an appropriate mask, perform proper hygiene and follow social distancing protocols.



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COVID-19 is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing), and touching surfaces contaminated with the virus. There is also a possibility of transmission through feces. Since this is a new virus where the source and how it develops is not yet entirely clear, the risk of transmission from the body can be caused by the fluid coming out of the body. This is the reason why it is paramount for the personnel who handle the dead bodies to protect themselves by wearing an adequate personal protective equipment.

(WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION/ WHO)

## PRAYER AND BURIAL

- Public and private crematoria, cemeteries or private burial grounds shall be designated for the disposal of the body
- The transport of the dead to the burial site must follow government guidelines with regards to permissions. The deceased must be securely contained in a dedicated vehicle for transport, and the vehicle decontaminated after use.
- The funeral ritual and prayers are organized by the officers of the Church according to the regular funeral liturgy, in consultation with the family.
- During the funeral, both Church staff and attending family members (domestic legislation states adults only) must follow health protocols on sanitation by wearing appropriate PPE and observing social distancing measures in order to prevent COVID-19 transmission.
- In accordance with domestic legislation, burial/cremation must occur within 12 hours of death.
- For burial, the grave must be in a location where the water table is more than 2 meters deep from the natural ground surface and more than twenty-five (25) meter radius of any residential area. The body must be buried at least 1.5 meters below ground level.

## AFTER THE BURIAL

- Remove disposable PPE and discard appropriately, so as to avoid cross-contamination.
- Thoroughly wash hands with clean running water and antiseptic soap, or use hand sanitizer of >70% ethyl alcohol.
- Once you reach home, all clothing, facemasks, footwear and personal effects (such as eyeglasses, rings, watches) must be immediately discarded or cleaned with disinfectant.
- Take a shower before resting, touching objects in the home or meeting with other family members.

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*The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.*

*We have been working in the Philippines since World War II, establishing a permanent presence in 1982.*



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