



Abp Marek Zalewski

Pontifical Representative's letter to Bishops and Faithful in Vietnam

Your Eminence,
Reverend Archbishops and Bishops,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During this time of Covid-19 pandemic in South-East Asia, some of you have shared with me your experience of this unexpected and disconcerting situation. In this way, even though I was not able to leave Singapore or encounter you directly, you have let me know what you were going through.

My last travel to Vietnam concluded on January 5 this year after my short visit to the Archdiocese of Hue for the inauguration of the Jubilee year of 170th anniversary of this central and historic Archdiocese. Since then, we seemed to be a part from one another as part of worldwide pandemic social distancing and quarantine. I had to cancel my planned pastoral visits to the dioceses of Ha Tinh, Qui Nhon, and Thanh Hoa, as well as our plans to organize the Pope's Day with liturgical and social celebration in both Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh city.

Vietnam has gone through 3 periods of Covid-19 infection: First infection imported from China during the Lunar New Year with 16 cases in community; second period began on March 7 from a Vietnamese traveller returned from Europe and infected 124 people; after three months of no local transmissions, the threat of Covid-19 suddenly surged on July 25 with a locally transmitted case. Hovering around 400 cases in late July, the number of confirmed cases has now surged above 780 with more than 20 casualties.

I also learned about many charitable projects of the local Churches, reaching out to sustain the lives of those who lost their job from social distancing, to feed the street-sellers who lost their daily bread from the token of income each day, to pave new path for those internal migrant workers who got cut-off from work. All of these good deeds you have done, individually or constitutionally, for the least among you have been counted in the sight of Christ who came to save our humankind.

The disconnection of travels from Singapore has limited my physical presence amongst you, but did not completely restrict me from my mission. I always exchange information with you, I listen to your concerns and continue to serve the needs of the Church in Vietnam. We are in communion!

This letter serves as a mean to communicate with you my fraternal support and ecclesial unity during this time of difficulty and anxiety. Encouraged by your wisdom and apostolic zeal, I am writing to you because I want to keep myself close to you, Leaders of the Church in Vietnam, and accompany you and all Catholics and People of Vietnam along the way. The importance is not to lose the enthusiasm of faith and evangelical hope!

As Pope Francis said in this time of Covid-19: *"Hope also depends on our efforts, and we have to help one another to keep it alive and active. I mean that contagious hope which is cultivated and reaffirmed in the encounter with others, and which, as a gift and a task, is given to us in order to create the new "normality" that we so greatly desire"*.

Your Eminence, Reverend Archbishop and Bishops, dear brothers and sisters,

I renew to each of you my deep appreciation for what you have done in this complex situation. May the Lord Jesus bless you and the Blessed Virgin, whose Assumption into Heaven we commemorate today, watch over you always.

With Apostolic Blessing,

Mark Zalewski

Archbishop Marek Zalewski
Pontifical Representative



Singapore, 15 August 2020
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary