



SOCIETA' DI SAN FRANCESCO DI SALES

Sede centrale salesiana
Via Marsala 42 - 00185 Roma
L'Economo Generale

Rome, 19-03-2020

Prot. 22/0107

Dear Fr. Provincial,

I hope you have been able to make your way back home. You can imagine how concerned we are about the situation. The figures you see on international tables about the number of infected people in your country could be extremely misleading and could give us a false complacency. In many countries, the figures are low only because very few tests have been performed. This is not surprising when we see that not even the United States has enough testing kits as yet.

The only possible preventive measures are:

1. Wash your hands with soap very frequently.
2. Totally avoid touching your MEN – Mouth, Eyes and Nose. If you have a terrible itch, wash your hands before you touch.
3. Keep a distance of at least 1.5 metres from everyone, even from those showing no symptoms at all.
4. Wear a mask if you have a cold, fever or flu of any sort, and isolate yourself totally till you are fine.
5. Improve your general health, especially with healthy food.

I would like to make a few general suggestions.

1. Take particular care of the elderly in your institutions, parishes and communities and those with other chronic illnesses like diabetes. They are the most vulnerable.
2. Do NOT presume that our children are safe (a baby of a few months has been known to have been infected).
3. Obey the orders of your own government regarding the closure of schools and hostels, and the conduct of functions in churches or institutions. If you have orphans who have no home to go to, take all the precautions necessary to protect them.
4. People who have recovered from infection do NOT necessarily have immunity. They could fall ill again. Do not expose them to that possibility.

I am not going into the symptoms of this illness, the way it is spread, nor things to do for prevention – all of which you can find on numerous websites (though at times very diverse and even contradicting!) I have a **few preventive measures specifically for us as Salesians:**

1. Let us be cautious but avoid any sign of panic.
2. Use all possible means of communication to build awareness among the confreres, students, parishioners and their families on prevention and care.
3. Respect scrupulously the order or guidelines given by your civil authorities, and let our students, parishioners and beneficiaries **see** that we respect them. Let us educate and lead by example.

4. Can we **produce** masks in our own institutions and provide them to the public, too? Ensure that all those with a cold or cough wear them.
5. Do you need washing machines to ensure that clothes are washed frequently enough?
6. Ensure that soap is freely and abundantly available to all those staying with us for frequent and thorough washing of hands.
7. Do we have rooms or spaces available where confreres or students can be in isolation if they show any symptoms, even if there is no facility near you for the official medical testing?
8. How can you ensure that confreres and boys have healthy food?
9. Can we get ready for a time when the hospitals in your area get overwhelmed? Are there ways to prepare our buildings to receive patients and offer them facilities for isolation and any other care we can provide them – in collaboration with your civic authorities? Our models are Don Bosco and his boys at the time of a cholera epidemic. More recently, we had our courageous confreres in Sierra Leone and Liberia at the time of Ebola.

It would be unfortunate if we do not make use of this **opportunity to get some learnings** out of this experience – for ourselves and for those we educate and evangelize:

1. Solidarity – How can we of service to those who are in great need than we are?
2. The importance of cleanliness – personal and of our environment
3. Importance of a healthy diet and really nutritious food
4. Promotion of a healthy lifestyle in our communities and the families of those we serve
5. Self-discipline in all aspects of our personal and social life
6. Importance of strengthening our self-sustainability (we can expect a sharp fall in donations to all charities, including Don Bosco)
7. Greater reliance on God and less pride in our ‘conquest’ of nature through technology
8. Discovering or inventing methods of distant learning, teamwork without physical proximity, guiding a work-team through the internet, etc.
9. Evangelization, pastoral ministry and counselling through the social media. Make it known to students, parents and parishioners that you are available to them at any time – online.
10. Cultivation of personal activities that are productive, educative and recreational activities
11. Simple things like kitchen gardens and small-scale animal rearing
12. Planning – Limiting our shopping trips into town by first preparing a shopping list and an estimate of the medium-term needs of our community.

Dear Father, I know that these are not eye-openers! These are very simple things, shared with you – more than anything else – to show our concern for our confreres and those we care for. Let us be close to one another in this time of social distancing with a serious sense of solidarity and love. Do not hesitate to contact me if you feel the need of any assistance from us.



Bro Jean Paul Muller
Economer General