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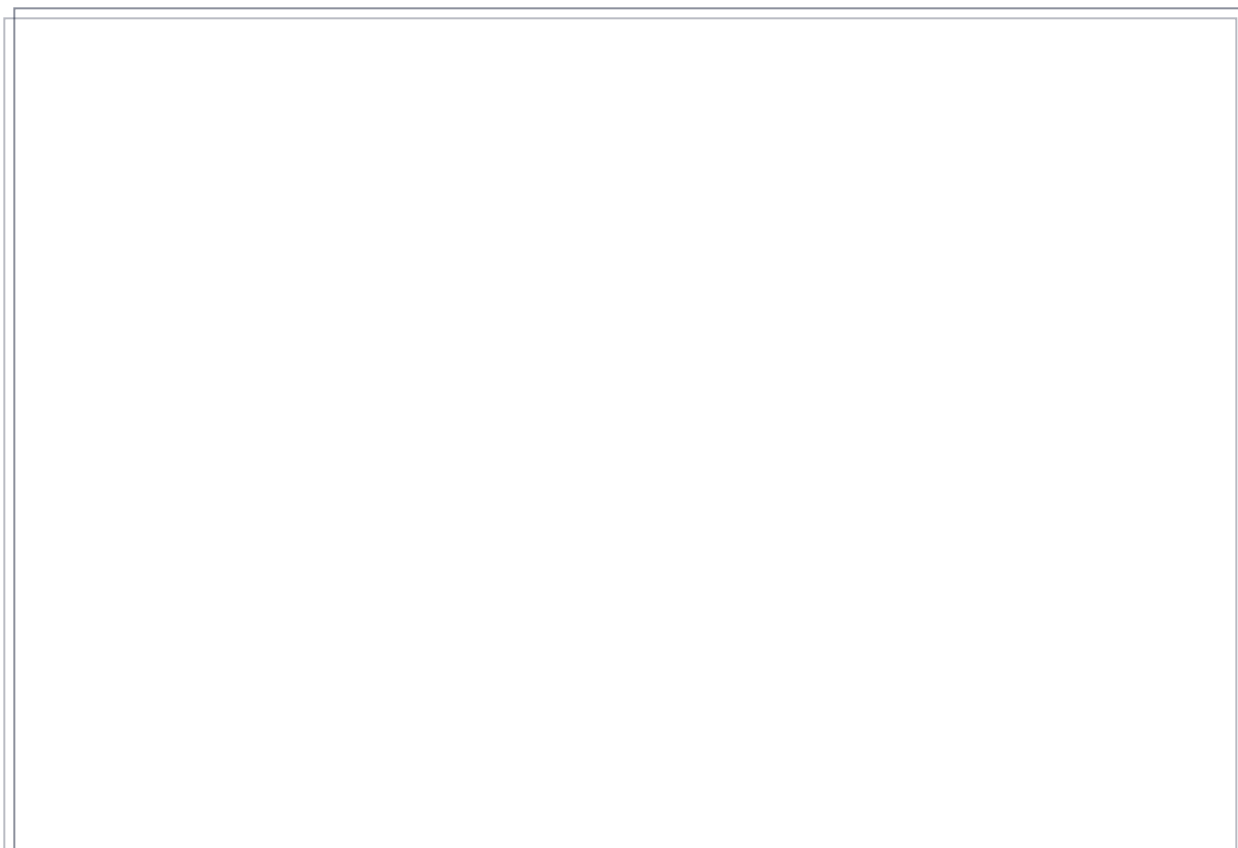
PHILIPPINES

CATHOLIC CHURCH

# Archdiocese of Manila to defy government ban on Holy Week gatherings

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PATERNO R. ESMAQUEL II





INFO



## MANILA, PHILIPPINES

(UPDATED) *'Hindi dapat tayo sumunod sa ganyang pamamalakad na walang konsultasyon,' says Bishop Broderick Pabillo of Manila*

The Archdiocese of Manila decided on Tuesday, March 23, to defy the Philippine government's ban on religious gatherings in Metro Manila and 4 surrounding provinces for two weeks, including Holy Week.

In a pastoral letter issued on Tuesday, Bishop Broderick Pabillo said the Archdiocese of Manila will continue religious services at 10% church capacity starting Wednesday, March 24.

The Archdiocese of Manila covers the cities of Manila, Pasay, Makati, Mandaluyong, and San Juan.

"We will not have any religious activity outside of our churches such as *senakulo*, *pabasa*, processions, motorcades, and Visita Iglesia. But within our churches

starting March 24, we will have our religious worship within 10% of our maximum church capacity," Pabillo said.

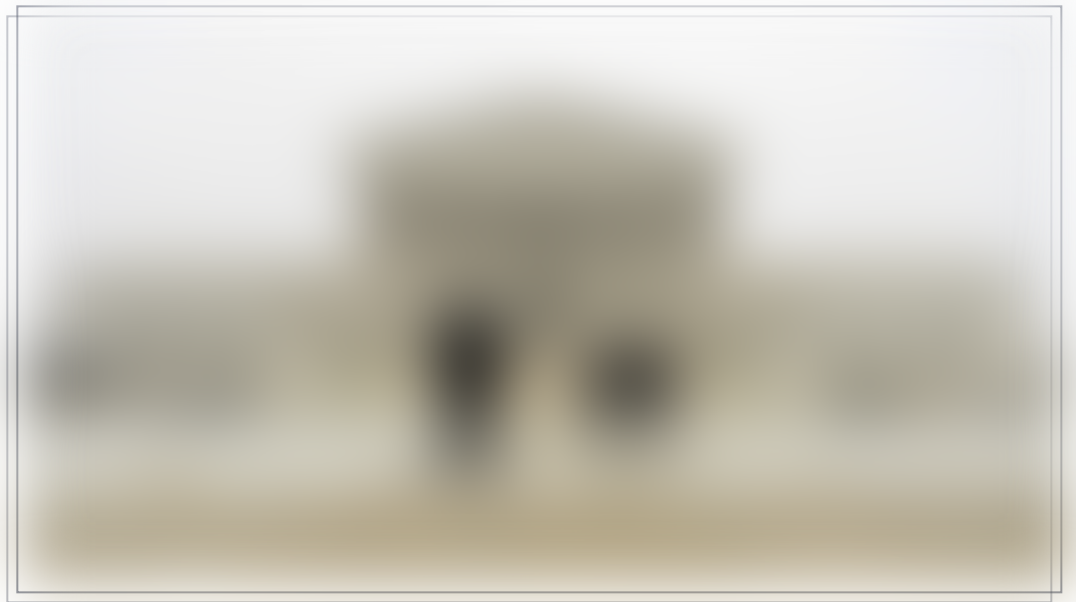
"Let the worshipers be spread apart within our churches, using the health protocols that we have been so consistently implementing," Pabillo added, even as he encouraged most other Catholics to join religious services via livestreaming.

In an interview with church-run Radio Veritas earlier on Tuesday, Pabillo called on Catholics to defy the **government's ban on religious gatherings**, as he echoed a long-standing debate about safety from the coronavirus and religious freedom.

*"So diyan mali na sila at hindi dapat tayo sumunod sa ganyang pamamalakad na walang konsultasyon and it somehow breaks the separation of church and state,"* Pabillo said on Radio Veritas. (They are wrong, and we should not follow such guidelines that lacked consultations, and it somehow breaks the separation of church and state.)

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Pabillo's pastoral letter contradicts the latest guidelines by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF), as approved by President Rodrigo Duterte.

The IATF guidelines, dated March 21, ban all kinds of mass gatherings from March 22 to April 4. The period of the ban covers Holy Week, which starts on Palm Sunday, March 28, and ends on Easter Sunday, April 4.

"All mass gatherings, including religious gatherings, shall be prohibited," the IATF guidelines state. The rules allow weddings, baptisms, and funeral services, but these "shall be limited to 10 persons."

### **Palace: 'We can order churches closed'**

Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque, in response, warned Pabillo about his plan to defy the guidelines set by the IATF.

"Defiance of an IATF resolution is not covered by separation of church and state. What is covered is the freedom to believe and the freedom not to endorse a religion," Roque said in a news briefing. "But in the exercise of police powers, we can order the churches closed. *Huwag sana dumating doon, Bishop Pabillo* (I hope we don't come to that)," he added.

A staunch Duterte critic, Pabillo is the apostolic administrator, or temporary head, of the Archdiocese of Manila as Pope Francis has not named the successor of Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle.

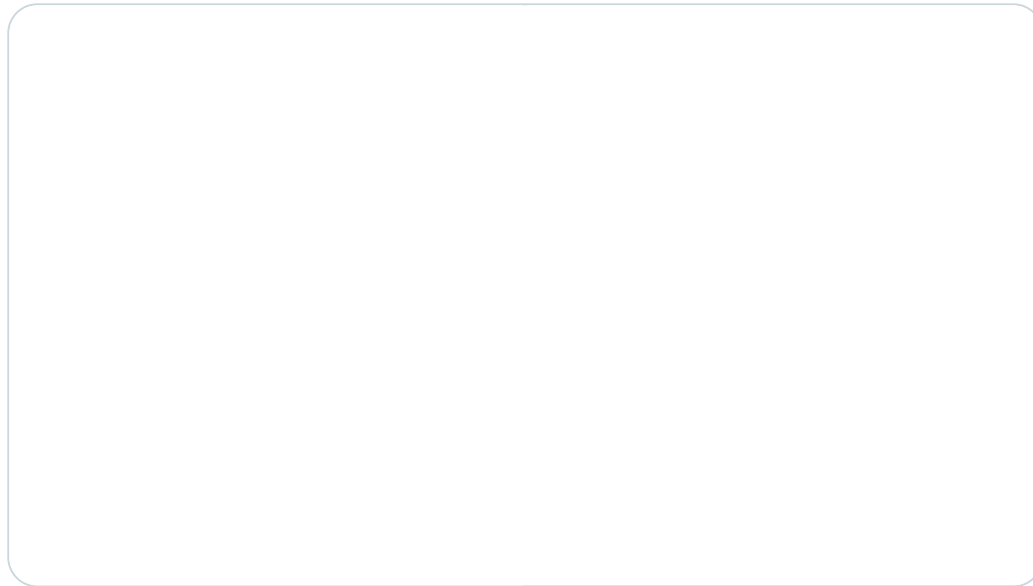
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Other dioceses or Catholic territories have their own bishops, who have the right to make their own decisions. They are directly accountable only to the Pope, not the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) or the Archdiocese of Manila.

In Metro Manila, the bishops of Novaliches and Cubao (covering the whole of Quezon City) and the bishop of Pasig (covering Pasig, Taguig, and Pateros) decided to cancel religious services in the areas even before the government banned religious gatherings.

Caloocan Bishop Pablo Virgilio David, vice president of the CBCP, however **slammed the Duterte government** on Monday, March 22, for banning church gatherings while allowing gyms and spas to operate in the area now labeled as "NCR Plus."

In all caps, David posted on his Facebook page: “IN SPITE OF OUR ADHERENCE TO STRICT PROTOCOL YOU LOCK DOWN OUR CHURCHES DURING THE HOLIEST TIME OF THE YEAR AND ALLOW 70 PERCENT CAPACITY IN FITNESS CENTERS AND 50 PERCENT IN ESTABLISHMENTS FOR PERSONAL CARE SERVICES, INCLUDING SPAS?!!! ALL RIGHT. MAY GOD HAVE MERCY ON YOUR SOULS!” – **Rappler.com**

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## Paterno R. Esmaque II

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Paterno R. Esmaque II, news editor of Rappler, specializes in covering religion and foreign affairs. He obtained his MA Journalism degree from Ateneo and later finished MSc Asian Studies (Religions in Plural Societies) at RSIS, Singapore. For story ideas or feedback, email him at [pat.esmaquel@rappler.com](mailto:pat.esmaquel@rappler.com).

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