

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
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Washington, DC

*Ministry in the Midst of Pandemic:
A Survey of Lesotho Bishops*

July 2020



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Ministry in the Midst of Pandemic: A Survey of Lesotho Bishops

Executive Summary

The Survey of Lesotho Bishops about Ministry in the Midst of Pandemic was designed by Sr. Aloysia Sebueng Makoae, SNJM, and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) in Spring 2020. Seeking to investigate the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the four Lesotho arch/dioceses, Sr. Makoae sent a link to the survey – hosted on CARA’s website – to the four bishops of Lesotho via WhatsApp and by email. Follow up reminders were emailed and sent via WhatsApp until all four bishops responded. A similar survey was developed at the same time and sent out to a random sample of priests. The findings for that survey will be presented in a separate report.

Major findings can be summarized as follows:

- The parishes’ celebration of Baptisms (100%) is most likely to have been affected strongly by the Covid-19 pandemic. Two-thirds or more dioceses report that their celebration of or programs for the following have been “very much” affected: the morale of the lay ecclesial ministers (75%), the ability of Catholic Charities to serve the people in need (75%), other sacramental preparation (75%), the celebration of First Communions (75%), the celebration of Holy Thursday services (75%), their own morale as the bishop (75%), and the morale of the deacons (67%).
- While other aspects of the dioceses did not have a majority of bishops saying they have been “very much” affected, that does not mean that they were not affected at all. Combining those responding “somewhat” and “very much,” 100% of dioceses say the pandemic has at least “somewhat” affected:
 - The morale of the lay ecclesial ministers of their dioceses
 - The ability of Catholic Charities to serve people in need in their dioceses
 - Other sacramental preparation in their dioceses, the celebration of First Communions in their dioceses
 - The celebration of Holy Thursday services, their own morale as the bishop of their dioceses
 - The morale of the deacons of their dioceses
 - The morale of their staff at the LCBC
 - The celebration of Confirmations in their dioceses
 - The celebration of Marriages in their dioceses
 - The celebration of Funerals in their dioceses
- Bishops were asked to write a response to this topic: “If you issued any special pastoral or practical provisions for your diocese as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, please briefly describe what they were.” Bishops are most likely to report issuing directives to close

churches temporarily, providing instructions for Easter celebrations, and issuing letters of encouragement to priests and parishioners to celebrate Masses online or on social media.

- To address the financial issues facing their dioceses due to the pandemic, bishops are most likely to say all the four dioceses have undergone the challenges caused by the lockdowns and the bishops are apprehensive that the livelihood of the priests and other operations in the dioceses have been affected badly, as there would be no means of generating the funds.
- Bishops who wrote a response to the question of what their biggest concern is regarding the financial health of their diocese and its parishes, schools, and programs are most likely to have mentioned issues related to temporarily closing one or more Catholic elementary schools (100%), temporarily closing one or more Catholic high schools (100%), encouraging parishioners to celebrate Mass by listening to a radio broadcast (100%), and closing one or more parishes (75%). Half of dioceses are currently reducing the salary of some diocesan staff (50%), eliminating one or more diocesan programs (50%), and suspending one or more diocesan programs (50%). Finally, one-quarter of responding bishops say their dioceses had laid off some diocesan staff (25%).
- When asked if they have modified the assessments that parishes pay to the chancery, half of the bishops say they have modified the assessments and half did not do so.

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Ministry in the Midst of Pandemic: A Survey of Lesotho Bishops

Introduction

The Survey of Lesotho Bishops about Ministry in the Midst of Pandemic was designed by Sr. Aloysia Sebueng Makoae, SNJM, and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) in Spring 2020. Seeking to investigate the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the four Lesotho arch/dioceses, Sr. Makoae sent a link to the survey – hosted on CARA’s website – to the four bishops of Lesotho via WhatsApp and by email. Follow up reminders were emailed and sent via WhatsApp until all four bishops responded. A similar survey was developed at the same time and sent out to a random sample of priests. The findings for that survey will be presented in a separate report.

Interpreting This Report

Most of the questions in this survey use four-point response scales (i.e., “not at all,” “only a little,” “somewhat,” “very much”). These scales allow respondents to choose between two relatively “negative” choices (e.g., “not at all” and “only a little”) and two relatively “positive” choices (e.g., “somewhat” and “very much”). In parts of the analysis in this report, these responses are combined to allow for clearer comparisons. However, as sometimes examining the most positive response distinguishes important contrasts in level of support, those responses are presented separately. Additionally, the appendix shows the percentage responses for each item, calculated out of 100%, as well as the percentage of all respondents that did not respond to each question, separately calculated out of 100% for clarity of comparison.

In addition to the quantitative data analyzed in this report, three open-ended questions on the survey collected qualitative data. For these data, bishops were prompted with a question and given an open box for written comments, rather than select from a set of response options. These comments are analyzed in separate sections throughout this report.

Assessment of Pandemic Damage and Diocesan Response

Five particular areas were addressed in the survey instrument. These areas are featured in this section of the report, though readers are advised to consult the response frequencies in the Appendix of this document for response rates and other pertinent information about these data. The areas addressed are:

- Covid-19 Pandemic's Effect on Dioceses
- Special Pastoral Provisions Issued by Dioceses
- Financial Concerns Related to the Covid-19 Pandemic
- Actions Taken to Address the Financial Health of the Diocese
- The Pandemic's Effect on Parish Assessments

Covid-19 Pandemic’s Effect on Dioceses

This section of the questionnaire asked responding bishops to estimate the effect the pandemic has had on various aspects of their dioceses and parishes. Respondents were asked if each aspect has been affected “not at all,” “only a little,” “somewhat,” or “very much.” The table below shows these percentages, ordered from those most affected (i.e., those saying “very much”) to those least affected.¹

Two-thirds or more of dioceses report that the following have been “very much” affected by the Covid-19 pandemic: the celebration of Baptisms (100%), the morale of the lay ecclesial ministers (75%), the ability of Catholic Charities to serve the people in need (75%), other sacramental preparation (75%), the celebration of First Communion (75%), the celebration of Holy Thursday services (75%), their own morale as the bishop (75%), and the morale of the deacons (67%). Among the other measures shown in the table below, all other aspects have half or less of dioceses saying these areas have been “very much” affected.

How significantly has the Covid-19 pandemic affected:				
<i>Percentage responding</i>				
	Very Much	Somewhat	Only a Little	Not at All
	%	%	%	%
The celebration of Baptisms in your diocese	100	0	0	0
The morale of the lay ecclesial ministers of your diocese	75	25	0	0
The ability of Catholic Charities to serve people in need in your diocese	75	25	0	0
Other sacramental preparation in your diocese	75	25	0	0
The celebration of First Communion in your diocese	75	25	0	0
The celebration of Holy Thursday services	75	25	0	0
Your own morale as the bishop of your diocese	75	0	25	0
The morale of the deacons of your diocese	67	0	33	0
The morale of your staff at the LCBC	50	50	0	0
The morale of the priests of your diocese	50	25	25	0
The morale of the staff at the diocese office	50	25	25	0
The celebration of Confirmations in your diocese	25	75	0	0
The celebration of Marriages in your diocese	25	75	0	0
The celebration of Funerals in your diocese	25	75	0	0

¹ As was discussed in the Introduction, the complete record of each response, including the percentages not responding to each question, is presented in the Appendix.

As discussed in the Introduction, another lens by which to examine these findings is to combine the two most positive responses, “very much” and “somewhat.” When those percentages are summed:

- One hundred percent of responding bishops report that the following have been “somewhat” or “very much” affected by the Covid-19 pandemic:
 - The morale of the lay ecclesial ministers of their diocese
 - The ability of Catholic Charities to serve people in need in their diocese
 - Other sacramental preparation in their diocese, the celebration of First Communions in their diocese
 - The celebration of Holy Thursday services, their own morale as the bishop of their diocese
 - The morale of the deacons of their diocese
 - The morale of their staff at the LCBC
 - The celebration of Confirmations in their diocese
 - The celebration of Marriages in their diocese and
 - The celebration of Funerals in their diocese.

- Between a quarter and one-third of the respondents attest that the following have been “only a little” affected by the pandemic: the morale of the deacons of their diocese (33%), their own morale as the bishop of their diocese (25%), the morale of the priests of their diocese (25%) and the morale of the staff at the diocese office (25%).

Special Pastoral Provisions Issued by Dioceses

Bishops were asked to write a response to this topic: *If you issued any special pastoral or practical provisions for your diocese as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, please briefly describe what they were.* All four bishops wrote in a response to the topic.

The responses depict that public Masses are prohibited and dispensation is granted to all Catholics from their Sunday Mass obligations during this pandemic. This indicates that churches closed temporarily. Different letters are issued depending on the requisite of an individual diocese such as letters instructing the parishioners how to go about Easter celebrations; or pastoral letters of encouragement to parishioners and priests. Some pastoral letters are issued to warn the faithful to take precautions from being contaminated and spreading Covid-19. It is also observed that Masses are celebrated online and broadcasted on social media or on an internet site.

Below are the bishops' responses.

Not really, but two parishes initiated Sunday Masses celebration by broadcasting through social media, internet.

Instructions on how to go about Easter celebrations. Pastoral letters in order to encourage both the priests and the faithful. Suggested some prayers.

Dispensed obligation for Mass; Online Masses and special services were provided through social media.

Pastoral letter warning the faithful to take precaution to the pandemic. Prohibited public Masses.

Financial Concerns Related to Covid-19 Pandemic

Bishops were asked to write a response to this question: *What is your biggest concern regarding the financial health of your diocese and its parishes, schools, and programs?* All four bishops of Lesotho wrote in a response to that question.

In generality of responding bishops wrote about financial issues related to their dioceses' parishes. The four leaders experienced more or less the same problem with finances. All four territories have undergone the challenges caused by the lockdowns and the bishops are apprehensive that the livelihood of the priests and other operations in the dioceses have been affected badly. There would be no means of generating the funds.

The bishops wrote:

It is a really challenge, shut down stopped any movement from parishes and projects could not be done.

The livelihood of the Priests as well as all the operations and maintenance of our diocesan facilities.

Income generating projects are on hold, thus the Diocese cannot function normally.

Very much affected.

Actions Taken to Address the Financial Health of the Diocese

This section asked Lesotho bishops what actions their dioceses have considered or taken to address the financial health of the diocese due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Respondents were asked to indicate for each if: “we considered doing so,” “we considered doing so, but decided against it,” “we are currently deciding whether to do so,” or “we have done so as a result of the pandemic.” The table below shows these percentages, ordered from those most likely to have been done to those least likely.²

To address the financial issues facing their dioceses due to the pandemic, bishops are most likely to say their dioceses have done the following: temporarily closing one or more Catholic elementary schools (100%), temporarily closing one or more Catholic high schools (100%), encouraging parishioners to celebrate Mass by listening to a radio broadcast (100%), and closing one or more parishes (75%). Half of dioceses are currently reducing the salary of some diocesan staff (50%), eliminating one or more diocesan programs (50%), and suspending one or more diocesan programs (50%). One-quarter of responding bishops say their dioceses had considered laid off some diocesan staff (25%).

How has your diocese considered and/or acted upon these means to address the financial health of the diocese as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Percentage responding

	We Have Done So as a Result of the Pandemic	We Are Currently Deciding Whether to Do So	We Considered Doing So, But Decided Against It	We Have Considered Doing So
Temporarily closing one or more Catholic elementary schools	100	0	0	0
Temporarily closing one or more Catholic high schools	100	0	0	0
Encouraging parishioners to celebrate Mass by listening to a radio broadcast	100	0	0	0
Closing one or more parishes	75	0	25	0
Reducing the salary of some diocesan staff	50	25	25	0
Eliminating one or more diocesan programs	50	25	0	25
Suspending one or more diocesan programs	50	0	0	50
Laying off some diocesan staff	25	25	50	0

² As was discussed in the Introduction, the complete record of each response, including the percentages not responding to each question, is presented in the Appendix.

- One out of four bishops says his diocese is “currently deciding whether to” reduce the salary of some diocesan staff (25%), eliminate one or more diocesan programs (25%), and lay off some diocesan staff (25%).
- Half of the bishops say that their dioceses have considered laying off some diocesan staff, but decided against it (50%). A quarter says it has decided against closing one or more parishes (25%) and reducing the salary of some diocesan staff (25%).

The Pandemic’s Effect on Parish Assessments

Bishops were asked to write a response to this question: *Did you waive or modify the assessments that parishes pay to the diocesan offices? If so, please describe.* All four bishops wrote in a response to the topic.

To speak to the point, on the one hand, two bishops – aware that the church in the third world faces economic challenges – say their parishes are still going to pay their shares in order to assist their dioceses to survive. On the other hand, the other two dioceses have modified the assessments in their territories.

Not at all.

Since we are already struggling in this regard there was nothing suggested.

Assessments were modified.

Due to Covid-19 lockdown we simply waived the assessments.....

Appendix: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies



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Survey of Bishops on the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Unless otherwise identified, the numbers shown below are the percentage giving each response, calculated out of 100 percent. The percentage not responding (NR) is shown separately, also calculated out of 100 percent.

Please respond for the parishes, schools, and other Catholic organizations for which you are responsible.

Please use these responses for each item in question 1.

1=Not at all 2=Only a little 3=Somewhat 4=Very much

1. How significantly has the Covid-19 pandemic affected:

1	2	3	4	NR	
0	25	25	50	0	A. The morale of the priests of your diocese?
0	33	0	67	25	B. The morale of the deacons of your diocese?
0	0	25	75	0	C. The morale of the lay ecclesial ministers of your diocese?
0	25	0	75	0	D. Your own morale as the bishop of your diocese?
0	25	25	50	0	E. The morale of your staff at the diocese office?
0	0	50	50	0	F. The morale of your staff at the LCBC?
0	0	25	75	0	G. The ability of Catholic Charities to serve people in need in your diocese?
0	0	25	75	0	H. Other sacramental preparation in your diocese?
0	0	0	100	0	I. The celebration of Baptisms in your diocese?
0	25	0	75	0	J. The celebration of First Communions in your diocese?
0	0	25	75	0	K. The celebration of Confirmations in your diocese?
0	0	75	25	0	L. The celebration of Marriages in your diocese?
0	0	75	25	0	M. The celebration of Funerals in your diocese?
0	0	25	75	0	N. The celebration of the Holy Thursday services?

Please use these responses for each item in question 2.

**1=We have considered doing so
2=We considered doing so, but decided against it
3=We are currently deciding whether to do so
4=We have done so as a result of the pandemic**

2. How has your diocese considered and/or acted upon these means to address the financial health of the diocese as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

1	2	3	4	NR	
0	25	25	50	0	A. Reducing the salary of some diocesan staff
0	50	25	25	0	B. Laying off some diocesan staff
0	0	0	100	0	C. Temporarily closing one or more Catholic elementary schools
0	0	0	100	0	D. Temporarily closing one or more Catholic high schools
0	25	0	75	0	E. Closing one or more parishes
25	0	25	50	0	F. Eliminating one or more diocesan programs
50	0	0	50	0	G. Suspending one or more diocesan programs
0	0	0	100	0	H. Encouraging parishioners to celebrate Mass by listening to a radio broadcast

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3. What is your biggest concern regarding the financial health of your diocese and its parishes, schools, and programs? **NR=0%**

4. If you issued any special pastoral or practical provisions for your diocese as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, please briefly describe what they were: **NR=0%**

5. Did you waive or modify the assessments that parishes pay to the diocesan office? If so, please briefly describe: **NR=0%**

Your (Arch)Diocese: _____ **NR=0%**

Please return this completed survey to:

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