

Dear Rev. Dom Eamon, Abbot General,

+ PAX

We would like to report on the impact of COVID-19 on Tobetsu community (Phare).

In our region, a state of emergency was declared in late February and nearly ended in late March. In the month of April, however, the infection spread across Japan again, and a state of emergency was declared for the entire country. During this period, people refrained from going out of their homes and most economic activities were halted. The state of emergency was lifted in the second half of May, and people's daily life seems to be recovering little by little, but we are being asked to reduce close contact between people to maintain social and physical distancing. The people continue to refrain from traveling to other parts of the country outside of work. In our area in the southern part of Hokkaido, there have been no cases of infection for the past two months, and no one in our community has been infected.

On liturgy and prayer : While Public Masses have been suspended in most parishes in Japan, our community has been able to celebrate the Divine Office and Mass daily as usual. Nevertheless, our Church inside the monastery is not yet open to the Public. In order to prevent infection, we sit one pew away in the choir apart from each other, to avoid crowding. After the daily Mass, the whole community prays together for all those that are suffering from the Covid-19 crisis throughout the world, and once a month we offer a Mass with the intention of "for those who are affected by the new coronavirus".

On the economic side : Our monastery's products are sold in a wide range of local gift shops and supermarkets. A large percentage of our cookies and candies are often purchased as souvenirs by tourists, but because of a falloff in tourists, the sales have dropped sharply. On the flip side, butter sales, which have a good reputation as delicious, were up significantly more than usual, thanks to people staying at home instead of going out. They sold very well and could make up for the decline in overall sales. However, the total revenue resulted in the red. Also, although Tobetsu monastery has become famous throughout Japan as a tourist attraction, the number of tourists has decreased dramatically. As a consequence, sales in the monastery's own shop have deteriorated. It is presumed that the economic difficulties will continue until the time when tourists can feel safe to travel in the future.

On hospitality : From March to July, we were obliged to close our guest house, furthermore, there have been a number of cancellations for groups in August and September. After August, when Coronavirus infection will seem to have settled down, we are considering accepting a smaller number of people for individual meditation. Visits and tours of the pilgrims have been cancelled for the time being.

On other aspects : Two elderly members are currently in the hospital for long term medical care, and we were unable to visit them from February to mid-June. Recently, we were finally allowed to visit them for a short time.

We had scheduled to receive the Regular Visitation in early July, but any foreign travel to Japan from abroad is seriously restricted at present that makes it difficult for Dom Steele of Tarrawarra, our Visitor, to make a visit to Tobetsu monastery at this time, so that we have postponed the Visitation to next year or later.

We had planned also to hold a new election of the superior of Oita, our daughter house in Japan. However, due to the difficulty of getting around even within the country, it has been delayed for a while.

That is all. Thank you.

All of the members in Tobetsu Monastery (Phare)