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## **Portugal: Bishops suspend all Masses and pastoral activities. “Painful decision, but responsibility is a moral imperative”**

All public Masses and pastoral activities in person are to be suspended in Portugal as of January 23. This is what the Portuguese Bishops' Conference has decided today. Due to the extremely severe Covid situation in the country, “we believe that it is a moral imperative for all citizens, and particularly for Christians, to take the necessary health precautions to avoid infections, which will help overcome this situation”. This is the reason behind the Bishops' “painful” decision. Just a few days ago, on January 15, the Permanent Council had decided to suspend weddings, confirmations, baptisms, but in-person Masses and funerals (and also catecheses) could still be celebrated depending on the size of each facility. Today, however, new restrictions were introduced in light of a rapid surge in Covid cases which have reached a record high of 219 deaths and 14,647 new infections yesterday. The Bishops ask that the celebrations be broadcast on digital channels, and that funerals be held in compliance with the rules agreed upon with the competent authorities. The dioceses of the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira are excluded from the new rules and should provide their own recommendations. The Bishops reiterate their “esteem and gratitude to those who, in hospitals and throughout the whole health care system, are at the forefront and continue to fight with extreme dedication to save lives at risk” and encourage the “consistent and responsible solidarity of all citizens so that, with the collaboration of all, this very serious crisis can finally be overcome”.

Valentina Bombelli