

This comes after President Museveni directed that this year's national event be postponed as a precautionary public health measure.

BY SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

The Uganda Martyrs Catholic Shrine in Namugongo has scaled down this year's Uganda Martyrs Day celebrations following government directives suspending national pilgrimages over Ebola fears linked to the outbreak in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

In a pastoral communication issued on May 22, the Shrine Rector, Rev Fr Vincent Lubega, said the annual June 3 celebrations would no longer attract the usual mass gatherings of pilgrims after President Museveni directed that this year's national event be postponed as a precautionary public health measure. Lubega, however, clarified that the directive does not stop the shrine from conducting normal parish prayer activities, provided strict health and safety guidelines are observed.

"Following consultations with the Archbishop of Kampala, we in Namugongo Parish shall continue with the Uganda Martyrs Novena from May 25 to June 2, with daily Mass at 6pm and reflections on the martyrs beginning at 5pm," Fr Lubega said in the statement.

He added that the activities would be limited to parishioners and local worshippers, without the participation of

Ebola: Namugongo scales down Martyrs Day prayers



The clergy in a procession during Uganda Martyrs Day celebrations at the Namugongo Catholic Shrine. PHOTO/FILE

invited choirs, guest celebrants or organised pilgrim groups as has been the tradition in previous years.

"His Excellency the President's directive does not bar us from conducting our normal prayer activities but rather calls upon us to remain mindful of the circumstances under which we are op-

erating," the statement added.

On June 3, the shrine will hold several Masses for parishioners at the Basilica and Pavilion C following the normal Sunday schedule. Additional services will also take place at St Ponsiano Mbalwa, St Luke Nsasa and St Anthony of Padua Kira sub-parishes.

According to Fr Lubega, Masses at the Basilica will be held at 6:30am, 8am, 10am, noon and 5pm, while Pavilion C will host services at 8am, 10am and noon.

The shrine administration said pastoral and spiritual services across all out-stations under Namugongo Parish

BACKGROUND

The scaled-down celebrations come amid renewed concern over Ebola after the Ministry of Health confirmed three new infections on Saturday, bringing the country's total confirmed cases to five. The announcement came a day after the World Health Organisation warned that the Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC risked escalating into a wider regional epidemic.

would continue under strict standard operating procedures issued by the Ministry of Health. These include mandatory handwashing facilities and regular sanitisation of public spaces.

The guidance from Namugongo follows an earlier directive by the Uganda Episcopal Conference advising dioceses and pilgrims across the country to cancel travel plans to Namugongo and instead commemorate Uganda Martyrs Day from their local parishes and churches.

Uganda Martyrs Day, commemorated annually on June 3, is one of Uganda's largest religious events, drawing millions of pilgrims from across the country and the world.