Health protocols sought for political gatherings

The Philippine Star · 3 Jun 2021 · 6 · By JANVIC MATEO

With national elections less than a year away, a member of the OCTA Research Group on Tuesday recommended establishing health protocols and guidelines in the conduct of political gatherings to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

"Political gatherings are important for the health of democracy, but you have to make sure that they are done in a safe way," OCTA fellow and molecular biologist Fr. Nicanor Austriaco said in an interview with "The Chiefs" on One News.

"We're always worried about super spreader events and political events are prime candidates of super spreaders," he added.

Austriaco stressed the importance of having contact tracing protocols, along with other health measures such as limiting the number of attendees, ensuring social distancing and wearing of face masks.

"One of the things that we have to make sure that if there is an outbreak, our people have to be able to identify who was at that political gathering in order to quickly contact trace and isolate if necessary," he said. "The concern here is that we must not allow these necessary and important political gatherings to trigger another surge in the capital. That will be very difficult for us because we are already at high numbers."

Meanwhile in Quezon City, Mayor Joy Belmonte directed organizers of gatherings for community service or humanitarian purposes to notify the city government at least five days before to avoid turning the event into a super spreader.

Belmonte issued the directive following activities that resulted in transmission of COVID-19. It covers activities such as medical missions, kasalang bayan and distribution of food and cash assistance.

"Event organizers have the responsibility to provide appropriate crowd control measures to avoid excessive numbers of attendees and ensure proper physical distancing, such as through the use of marshals, stubs, coupons and similar strategies," said the mayor.

In case of violations of health protocols, the city's Department of Public Order and Safety was directed to bring the matter to the local law and order cluster for appropriate investigation and possible sanctions.