



19 March 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The situation around the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) seems to change by the hour in respect to government and public health advice.

Given that non-essential gatherings of people more than 100 have been directed, as of yesterday, by the Federal Government not to take place and on the advice of the Permanent Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv with the Diocesan Curia today have made the following determinations which will apply from this weekend and will be reviewed next week pending further advice from government and public health officials.

Fourth Sunday of Lent – 22 March 2020

Catholics from the Diocese of Parramatta are from 20 March 2020 dispensed from their Sunday Mass obligation until further notice (Canon 1248 §2 and Catechism 2181.)

In those parishes where 100 or less people attend a Sunday Eucharist Mass, they continue to be held in the Church building. Please check with your local parish in the first instance.

In those places where Mass attracts more than 100, all Masses MUST be conducted outdoors. Some parishes may also be increasing the number of Masses if they are able to do so. Again, check with your local parish in the first instance.

Masses conducted outdoors are to be celebrated without music, and with a shortened homily. Worshippers are asked to maintain a distance from each other during Mass.

Church buildings

Church buildings will be available for private prayer. If you do use the church for prayer, please maintain a safe distance from other worshippers.

Marriages

Couples intending on marrying should speak to their priest in the first instance. It is suggested that only the bridal party and immediate family attend the ceremony.

Funerals

In the case of funerals, again it would be best to speak with your priest directly. It is suggested only bereaved family members should attend the funeral.

Baptisms

Baptism of infants should proceed but only with the parents and Godparents present with the deacon or priest.

Pastoral Care

Pope Francis has stated that clergy be available to pastorally minister to people in this time of crisis. The Sacraments of Penance and the Sick should still be available.

In the case of the former, these should take place in a location where there can be 1.5 meters between the penitent and the priest.

Those who are gravely ill, either due to the virus, or some other malady should not in any circumstances be denied access to the sacraments.

In anointing people, the priest will wash their hands with an appropriate solution both before and after the anointing. In the laying on of hands, it is recommended that contact is not made with the person's head but the priest's hands are held above the head of the ill. The same applies to the administration of Viaticum.

In respect to ministry to the housebound, great caution will be exercised by priest and it is preferable if only the priest or deacon visits for the purpose of Holy Communion. Acolytes and Extraordinary Ministers of Communion should cease from visiting the housebound.

Parish meetings

All meetings relating to parish life should be suspended until further notice. Parish offices shall remain open, as much as is feasible.

We are in unprecedented times and we have a duty and responsibility to continue the pastoral care of our people as best we can given the restrictions.

Let us pray that all of us would be strengthened for the task ahead and relying on the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes and all the Saints we might persevere in carrying the Cross at this time.

With prayerful remembrance,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter G. Williams', with a horizontal line underneath.

Very Rev Peter G. Williams
Vicar General & Moderator of the Curia