



24 March 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Re: COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Update

Following from Bishop Vincent's [advice to clergy and parishes yesterday](#) it will be necessary to revisit some of the provisions for liturgical celebrations that were outlined in previous communications.

As you are aware the Prime Minister announced on Sunday evening (22 March 2020) certain prohibitions on activities that would result in people gathering together. In that list was mentioned "places of worship" that were to be closed by midday 23 March 2020. The proscription is around "religious gatherings."

In the Diocese of Parramatta last weekend, some parishes elected to conduct celebrations of the Eucharist with a few people inside and the bulk of people outside. That gesture was appreciated by many of the faithful.

However, Stage 1 (as announced on Sunday evening by the Prime Minister) which has now been implemented applies to "religious gatherings" of any sort so that means that what was permitted last Sunday is no longer possible.

Masses and church buildings

Bishop Vincent has issued instructions to parishes, based on the directive of the government, that public Masses (both indoor and outdoor) must now cease. Also affected by this closure are church buildings, adoration chapels and other church buildings used for prayer and religious services.

Funerals

Funerals are still permitted with only 10 attendees (effective 26 March 2020). If the funeral takes place in a church building the social distancing rules must be observed. In the circumstances, consideration for a simple grave side service or using the crematorium chapel with a small number of mourners (very immediate family) is recommended. A memorial Mass when the current crisis is declared over can be held.

Weddings

Weddings are permitted to take place with only five attendees (effective 26 March 2020). Like funerals, the social distancing rules are to be observed.

Baptism

It is suggested that baptism of infants not take place at this time unless the baptism is in case of emergency.

Penance

Given that the church cannot be used it places an extraordinary burden on priests as to how to respond to a request for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is suggested that each priest use his own discretion as to how to handle such requests, provided social distancing rules are to be observed.

Anointing of Sick

Individual request for the Sacrament of the Sick should be attended to in the manner described in the [previous instructions issued](#).

Holy Week

A decree was issued from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments concerning the liturgical celebrations during Holy Week this year. Parishes have been asked to make suitable preparations these liturgies to be celebrated with the necessary restraints in place. It is anticipated that all the Holy Week liturgies will be "live streamed" from the Cathedral with Bishop Vincent.

With prayers for all those suffering at this time and imploring the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes,

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