



19 March 2020

To the Pastors and People of God in the Diocese of Toowoomba

The public health emergency of the kind that we are experiencing is a rare event. Given the directions provided by the Government and after consultation the following provisions apply effective from midnight Friday 20 March 2020.

All regular public Masses are hereby suspended until 1st May. This includes all Holy Week Ceremonies.

The obligation to participate at Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation is dispensed.

The Faithful are encouraged to keep the Lord's Day holy and celebrate Sunday as a domestic church by taking time to pray together as a household. Resources will be made available in due course.

Funerals and Weddings and Baptisms must follow the Government limitations as regards numbers attending (currently 100 indoors).

Preparation for and celebration of Confirmation and First Communion is postponed until the pandemic is over.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Second Form of the Rite of Penance is to be suspended. The First Rite of Penance may continue. Government advice on maintaining minimum distances between priest and penitent should be adhered to.

Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick may be administered by the priest holding his hands above rather than upon the head. Anointing the forehead is sufficient. Gloves may also be worn for the distribution of the Sacrament. Priests and those visiting nursing homes or hospitals must adhere to the safety requirements currently in force within those institutions.

Churches are to remain open

Churches should remain open for the faithful to access for the purpose of private prayer and personal devotion. There are many ways by which a small number of parishioners may still wish to gather, remaining compliant with the law – small Rosary groups, for Exposition and Benediction.

We are living in uncharted times with implications about which we are uncertain. It is essential that *our* communities of Faith remain beacons of hope during this difficult and challenging time. It is critical that all our parishes consider the most creative ways by which to retain communication with their people.

It is very important that those members of our community who require assistance: the young; the elderly; people with disabilities; the poor and the sick; the homeless; are cared for and not abandoned.

Priests should ensure that parishioners can contact them in emergencies. The Priests and I will continue to celebrate Mass in private for all the people entrusted to our care.

Most Reverend Robert M McGuckin
Bishop of Toowoomba