

20 March 2020

Temporary suspension of all Masses due to Covid-19 coronavirus

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops have been carefully considering the steps they need to take with Mass and other public liturgical gatherings because of the strong Government restrictions on public gatherings to counter the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic.

Effective immediately, all Masses are to cease until further notice. Churches may remain open seven days a week for private prayers and reflection, but parish priests should ensure that numbers of people present remain small and follow Ministry of Health social distancing guidelines to stay at least 2 metres from each other.

Funeral services may continue but they must be brief and only with small numbers of close family and friends allowed. Those attending must also follow Ministry of Health guidelines for social distancing.

Baptisms, weddings and other public liturgical gatherings already planned may proceed but only with very small numbers of close family and friends present; again, those attending must follow Ministry of Health guidelines for social distancing.

Public liturgical gatherings not yet planned must not be approved and should be delayed until further notice. Funeral services will continue but with small numbers; these services will also meet safe practices and must be brief.

Your bishops must emphasise the serious nature of the Government restrictions and announcements of the past 24 hours – New Zealand's borders have been closed to all non-NZ residents; indoor public gatherings of more than 100 people have been banned, as have all outdoor gatherings of more than 500 people. The Government has imposed these and other measures to try to stop the Covid-19 virus from being passed on within the New Zealand community; closing the borders and strictly limiting public gatherings are seen as important ways to achieve this.

Your bishops' announcement today will disappoint many people, but it will also be welcomed by others. It also follows identical moves by Catholic bishops in many other countries. Pope Francis is himself setting the international Church example by not celebrating public Masses.

Your bishops and a number of dioceses are looking at live-streaming of Mass. Online resources for those who wish to pray at home, especially on Sundays, and to

follow daily Mass online are offered at www.nlo.org.nz or on your local Diocesan website.

We again emphasise to all parishioners the importance of good practices of hygiene, including regular washing of hands, covering coughs and sneezes with elbows not hands, staying at home if sick, and keeping a reasonable distance from other people when in public.

The official public health response to the Covid-19 pandemic is changing quickly and frequently. The primary concern of your Bishops is the safety of all parishioners, clergy, families, friends, staff and visitors to our many and varied premises.

We will continue to send updates as soon as new developments happen.

- ✘ Patrick Dunn, Bishop of Auckland and NZCBC President
- ✘ Steve Lowe, Bishop of Hamilton and NZCBC Secretary
- ✘ John Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington
- ✘ Paul Martin, Bishop of Christchurch
- ✘ Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin
- ✘ Michael Gielen, Auxiliary Bishop of Auckland