



BISHOP GREG'S PASTORAL LETTER

27 MARCH 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters

The last few weeks have been very difficult for all of us. From the end of January, I've had to remove more and more things from our churches and finally, in the last week have had to cancel Sunday and weekday masses and close our churches. This has been a great sadness for all of us. We have had no choice but to comply with Government directives, which I believe are for our well-being.

I thank you for your patience and on-going commitment to the Church. I know that you have many questions about the sacraments, pastoral care, schools and more generally spiritual well-being.

This Easter, there will be no public masses, however the priests will say masses privately. The Easter Triduum in the Cathedral and some other Parishes will be live-streamed. We will let you know how to access live-streams as soon as possible. The Chrism Mass has been postponed to 17 November 2020.

We are not able to have baptisms until further notice. Should there be an emergency please contact your Parish Priest.

We are not using our churches for funerals, however the priest may attend at the place of burial for prayers. Your Parish Priest is willing to say a private funeral mass for your loved one, and will be able to say a funeral mass for you all in church once the danger has lifted.

Weddings are still possible provided that they are restricted to the couple, the two witnesses and the Priest, however it is possible that the directives might change.

In regard to Reconciliation, we are not able to gather groups of people and therefore, the Second Rite of Reconciliation is no longer possible. For the safety of the priest and the penitent, the required social distancing must be followed.

The Church teaches that, when it is impossible to go to Confession, all that is required is an act of contrition and a promise to go to confession in the future.

In regard to Anointing of the Sick and of Viaticum, the Sacred Penitentiary in Rome has advised, "The Church prays for those who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick and of the Viaticum (Communion), entrusting each and every one to divine Mercy by virtue of the Communion of Saints and granting a Plenary Indulgence on the point of death, provided that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime."

Without specialised protective apparel it would be unsafe for our priests to anoint people with COVID-19. In fact, should they anoint without the appropriate protective apparel they would have to self-isolate for 14 days. As a consequence, we will not be able to anoint people with COVID-19.

For their own safety, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist are not to take Holy Communion to the sick.

Your Parish Priest will continue to provide pastoral care. Please telephone him if there is a need. The Diocese and Parishes are placing material on the internet so that there will be online spiritual support. This includes Mass, prayers and other spiritual items.

Many of our school students are now studying from home. Online teaching is being prepared. Online assistance for parents is also being prepared.

Until the emergency is over, I will offer daily mass for each of you. I will also spend more time in prayer asking Our Heavenly Father to take all fear from your hearts, to fill you with gentleness and peace, to give you and your loved ones His protection and to bring healing to those who contract the virus. I would be very grateful if you would remember me in your prayers.

Most Revd Greg Homering OCD
Bishop of Lismore