



For all things give thanks.

1 THESS 5:18

The church is the people of God

PASTORAL STATEMENT BY BISHOP BRIAN MASCORD

Updated parish directives as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19)

24 MARCH 2020

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ

Following a meeting of the National Cabinet, Prime Minister Scott Morrison defined places of worship as non-essential, and directed churches, religious gatherings, and places of worship to close from midday, Monday, 23 March 2020.

We recognise this news will be upsetting to Catholics and all people of faith. However, as the Prime Minister and Chief Medical Officer made clear, it is incredibly important that all Australians “do their bit” to help protect the health of others, especially our most vulnerable. For this reason, the Diocese of Wollongong will continue to adhere to the direction of government and health authorities in relation to COVID-19.

Given the dire circumstances and following medical advice, I direct the following for the Diocese of Wollongong:

- Public Masses and liturgies—both indoor and outdoor—are suspended until further notice.
- All faithful in the diocese are dispensed from the obligation to physically attend Mass on Sundays. However, parishioners can honour their Sunday obligation by participating in a time of prayer within the home, reading the Scriptures, or watching Mass on television/online (canon 87 §1, canon 1248 §2).
- Mass will continue to be said privately on a daily basis by priests throughout the diocese on behalf of the faithful.

- Church buildings, adoration chapels and other church buildings used for prayer and religious services are to remain closed from midday on Monday, 23 March 2020.
- Holy Communion is not to be given to anyone, including the sick, except as Viaticum for the dying.
- Small weddings and funerals that comply with the 1 person per 4 square metre rule can proceed.

I know this is an extremely difficult time. We are committed to adapting and meeting the challenges presented by COVID-19, and I will provide ongoing updates as new information becomes available.

May I take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for your support of each other and your clergy. I invite you to join me in praying this simple prayer.

God of Love, we the people of the Diocese of Wollongong turn to you with prayerful hearts and with confidence in your loving presence among us now and in every moment of our lives. We stand before you as people of hope, trusting in your care and protection. May we be comforted by your love in these anxious times.

Yours in Christ

+ Brian Mascord

Most Rev Brian G Mascord DD

BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG

24 March 2020

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MASS ATTENDANCE

Effective **Midday 23 March 2020**

in the Diocese of Wollongong:

- Public Masses and liturgies—both indoor and outdoor—are suspended until further notice.
- Mass will continue to be said privately by priests throughout the diocese on behalf of the faithful on a daily basis.
- The faithful can keep holy their Sunday by setting aside some time for prayer at home, reading the Scriptures of the day, watching Mass on television or online, and asking God for the graces they would normally receive in Holy Communion (canon 87 §1, canon 1248 §2).
- Church buildings, adoration chapels and other church buildings used for prayer and religious services are to remain closed from midday on Monday, 23 March 2020.
- Priests should consider continuing to publish their weekly parish bulletin online with advice and a weekly homily/reflection.
- Holy Communion is not to be given to anyone, including the sick, except as Viaticum for the dying.
- Sunday Mass and Holy Week services will be celebrated privately by the bishop and made available on the diocesan website from the fifth Sunday of Lent (29 March 2020).

BAPTISM

All parishes in the Diocese of Wollongong are asked to observe some practical changes concerning the Sacrament of Baptism until COVID–19 is contained.

At this time, Baptisms are still possible where there is a genuine and urgent cause for the sacrament to be celebrated. However, where a Baptism is celebrated, the number of family and guests attending is to be restricted to immediate family and godparents in order to limit any potential spread of the virus.

CONFESSION

Reconciliation can be made available by appointment with a priest and may occur in an appropriate indoor space or will occur outdoors in accordance with physical distancing requirements (one person per four square metres).

SACRAMENTAL PROGRAMS AND CELEBRATIONS OF THE SACRAMENTS

Preparation for and celebration of First Reconciliation, Confirmation and First Communion for children should be postponed until the pandemic is over.

WEDDINGS

Where weddings are to be held, the celebration of the sacrament should be a small event in accordance with current Government requirements in regard to physical distancing of one person per 4 square metres.

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FUNERALS

Funerals should be small with close family and friends in attendance and must be in accordance with current Government requirements in regard to physical distancing of one person per 4 square metres.

HOLY WEEK

At this time, the ceremonies of Holy Week will be celebrated privately by the bishop and made available on the diocesan website (dow.org.au) so they can be viewed and prayed.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

The Sacrament for the Anointing of the Sick will continue. However, for the protection of our most vulnerable parishioners, clergy have been given revised instruction on how to proceed.

Clergy should only visit the sick or infirm with COVID–19 in a hospital or aged care facility if requested by the patient, family or hospital personnel. Clergy are requested to contact hospital personnel to confirm that the appropriate precautions are met prior to administering the sacraments.

COMMUNION TO THE SICK

Holy Communion is not to be given to anyone, including the sick, except as Viaticum for the dying. If Viaticum for the dying is celebrated this is done according to the procedures for the anointing of the sick.

OTHER MINISTRIES TO BE SUSPENDED

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not to take Holy Communion to the sick.

All parish meetings are to be suspended at this time.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING AND HYGIENE

All parishes and parishioners are required to follow physical distancing and hygiene guidelines as provided by the health authorities, including:

- Good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene.
- Distancing of at least one person per 4 square metres.
- Self isolation if diagnosed with COVID–19 or when exposed to symptomatic or diagnosed COVID–19 persons.