



THE ARCHBISHOP OF BRISBANE

19 March 2020
Solemnity of St Joseph

TO THE PASTORS AND PEOPLE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE

These are anxious times as we enter new and uncharted territory. The spread of the coronavirus is alarming for a generation that has known nothing like it, and it shows how fragile we are. How long it will last we do not know, but almost certainly we are in for the long haul. For all of us, this is a challenge at many levels.

In the Archdiocese there is a daily meeting to address the most recent advice from the Government and the health authorities and to consider its implications for the Catholic community. As a result, we have already taken some decisions to curb the spread of the virus. Now in the light of the latest advice from the Government and Catholic Health Australia, the Archdiocese has come to further decisions. Therefore, the provisions below will now apply and more are sure to follow:

- The celebration of Mass on Sundays (including the Saturday vigil) is suspended with immediate effect and until further notice, and all the faithful are dispensed from the Sunday obligation.
- Priests will continue to celebrate Mass (the *Mass for the people*) on Sundays without a congregation, with people able to follow Masses live-streamed from the Cathedral at archbne.org/bzw on Sundays and weekdays.
- For the time being, weekday Masses may be celebrated as scheduled, with the current restrictions and precautions to be observed.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation should in general be celebrated only by appointment with the priest, with the current precautions to be observed.
- Any Church celebration or event where more than 100 people are expected should be cancelled or postponed.
- All attending any Church celebration or event should respect the requirements of physical distancing.
- All ministers of Holy Communion, including the priest, should disinfect their hands before and after distributing.
- In the Ordinary Form of the Latin Rite, the Body of Christ should be administered only in the hand and the chalice should be received by the celebrant alone.
- The Sign of Peace should be limited to saying "Peace be with you" with a nod or bow; no hand-shaking or hand-holding should occur here or at the Our Father.
- Hymn books should not be used.
- As far as possible, churches should remain open to allow private prayer; the Blessed Sacrament might be exposed in the monstrance for this purpose (as long as fewer than 100 are attending and with the usual provisions for reverence and security of the Sacrament).

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- Communion to the sick should be taken by priests alone and in general be restricted to Viaticum to the dying, with the current restrictions and precautions to be observed.
- Prayers of intercession for an end to the pandemic and for the safety of all should be included in Masses, in the Liturgy of the Hours and in private prayer; houses of consecrated religious are asked to intensify their intercessory prayer also.
- Baptisms, weddings and funerals may be celebrated, but restricted if necessary to immediate family; baptisms and weddings can always be postponed.
- Preparation for and celebration of First Penance, Confirmation and First Communion should be postponed until the pandemic is over.
- Priests should ensure that parishioners can contact them in emergencies.

It is essential in a time such as this to strengthen and deepen our spiritual life, precisely so that we do not “lose sight of Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2). The Archdiocese will do everything possible to assist you with this; and there is an abundance of online resources – including Mass at home – to nourish your faith through this time. As Pope Francis has said, pastors will have to show creativity in ministering to their people; and there are many examples of this around the world, with technology making it less difficult than in the past.

To conclude I offer two prayers which you may wish to pray through this time. The first is one I have written: its words are simple but they may help to guide you in your prayer. May the God to whom we turn in this moment listen to the pleading of our heart and answer as he has so often before, so that love may come from fear, hope from despair and joy from sorrow:

Almighty and all-merciful God,
lover of the human race, healer of all our wounds,
in whom there is no shadow of death,
save us in this time of crisis;
grant wisdom and courage to our leaders;
watch over all medical people
as they tend the sick and work for a cure;
stir in us a sense of solidarity beyond all isolation;
if our doors are closed, let our hearts be open.
By the power of your love destroy the virus of fear,
that hope may never die
and the light of Easter, the triumph of life,
may shine upon us and the whole world.
Through Jesus Christ, the Lord risen from the dead,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

Holy Mary, health of the sick, pray for us.
St Joseph, guardian of us all, pray for us.



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The second is an ecumenical prayer from the National Council of Churches, who have invited all of us to pray this prayer at 7pm each day, but especially on Sunday 29 March which we will mark as a National Day of Prayer in this time of crisis:

Gracious God,
We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.
We prayerfully seek your grace, amidst COVID-19 here and overseas.
We pray for those in need of healing.
We pray for your peace with those who are anxious or grieving.
We pray you will continue to strengthen and sustain
all those who are serving in response.
We pray for your Holy Spirit's discernment
amidst the many choices and decisions
facing our national, community and medical leaders.
We pray we each might see quickly what more we can do
to help those who are vulnerable.

This prayer for our nation in the family of nations,
with all that is on our hearts,
we gather now and pray
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

With the blessing of peace,

Archbishop of Brisbane