



*We proclaim a crucified Christ*

1Cor1.23

23 March 2020

Good afternoon everyone,

As mentioned earlier today, I have needed to wait to gain a clearer picture around the implications of the most recent government directives on our particular circumstances before emailing you.

The Archdiocese has been in direct communication with civil authorities over the course of today. Not every question can be answered immediately, but the basic picture is now clear. Therefore, I can now inform you of the following directives, noting that further changes are likely in coming days. Can I remind you to be both ready to receive email correspondence, and to be in touch with each other, to ensure the latest information is being shared.

### **CHURCHES, MASSES and LITURGIES:**

We have been directed by Government (state and federal) to close all places of worship and religious gatherings. At this point in time, this means the closing of our church doors, not just to the celebration of Mass and other liturgies, but for all activities that would involve the presence of a number of people for a period of time. Therefore, I ask that you now immediately close the doors of your church(es), if you have not already done so, and place appropriate signage on doors to this effect.

There are a couple of exceptions to this directive:

- **Funerals and Weddings:** These may still take place, but only with very small groups and where the '1 person per 4 square metres' rule applies. (The Australian Funeral Directors Association have provided some points which may be helpful as follows.)
  - All hygiene precautions must be adhered to and every encouragement should be given for the elderly and health-compromised not to be present.
  - Doors must be closed to further public access.

**Most Rev Peter A Comensoli**  
Archbishop of Melbourne



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- Spacing could be designated with a sheet of paper where one sits or alternate pews could be used for seating.
  - All surfaces must be properly disinfected before and after the liturgy; this is the responsibility of the church.
  - There must be a clear statement of specifics about social distancing, i.e., no kissing, no hugging, no embraces, no touches, and 2 metres apart.
  - The newspaper announcement should state that this is a “small, closed family service.”
  - If there is a condolence book, disposable pens must be provided (one pen not permitted), or a staff member records attendees on a laptop, or guests bring their own pen.
  - The family should instruct attendees to bring their own wipes for before and after.
- **Private Prayer:** We are still waiting for clarity on this directive.
    - NSW has closed its churches to private prayer. Until we hear further from the Victorian government, I ask that we do the same to ensure that we are not ‘encouraging’ gathering of any sort.
- **Live-Streamed Masses:** These may go ahead if your parish is able to do this via your website, YouTube or Facebook channels.
    - Please be mindful that live-streaming means live – so adherence to good hygiene and distancing regulations need to be met at all times.
    - You will be going out to a public audience and need to model responsibility in all areas.
    - Only the very minimum of authorised ministers/assistants should be present
    - Doors are to remain closed

I am mindful of the already many creative ways in which priests and laity, parishes and communities, are sustaining faith and encouraging hope. I want to commend you for this, and encourage you to share ideas and know-how with one another. If you are able to provide messaging (video, phone, written) in other languages, please also be encouraged to do so. Make sure you send a copy to the Office for Communications [[tiffany.davis@cam.org.au](mailto:tiffany.davis@cam.org.au)] so it might be shared more broadly.

Please assure your people in every way that the measures being put in place are for their safety, for the safety of the most vulnerable, and for the safety of all whom they love most dearly. I extend my deepest gratitude to you all in helping our people find new ways to pray through these difficult days.

I continue to draw your attention to the Archdiocesan website for up-to-date information and resources.

I will be meeting via Zoom tomorrow with the VG, Regional Vicars and senior staff to plan and address the many other questions and issues needing attention, including missionary, financial, property, staffing and other implications.

This is indeed a sad time for us all. With you, I am finding this 'closure' of the normal life of faith hard to fathom. Yet, we are a people of hope in Christ Jesus, and he will not abandon us.

May this great season of the Church, this time of preparation and celebration, not be seen as lost, but something embraced in a new, life-giving way.

As our Father entrusted the care of his only Son to St Joseph, we call on him in prayer to protect and guide us gently through these troubled times.

St Joseph, pray for us.

With every grace and blessing, I remain,

With every grace and blessing, I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'P' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke. A small cross symbol is visible to the left of the signature.

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli  
Archbishop of Melbourne