

For all things give thanks.

1 THESS 5:18

PASTORAL STATEMENT BY BISHOP BRIAN MASCORD

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

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ

In the midst of the ongoing COVID–19 (coronavirus) situation, it is essential that our communities of faith remain calm, ordered and respectful. By doing this in the face of uncertainty and challenge, we reveal ourselves as bearers of Christ's love in the world.

After considering the recent advice from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and direction from the Federal and NSW Governments, the following measures will be in place, effective Saturday 21 March 2020:

- No public Masses will be celebrated in the Diocese of Wollongong.
- All faithful in the diocese will be 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 by priests throughout the diocese on behalf of the faithful on a daily basis.
- Churches will, as far as possible, remain open for private prayer.

These decisions have not been made lightly. I understand this news may be upsetting, and I share your sadness. However, it is our responsibility as a pastoral community to put the care of our members—especially the most vulnerable—first. At this stage, the most effective way we can do this is to temporarily suspend public participation at Mass.

Canon Law recognises valid reasons for temporarily setting aside our Sunday obligation and we are following the example of dioceses in Australia and around the world, including the Diocese of Rome.

It is important to remember at all times that proper care for oneself and for others reflects the love of God and love for our neighbour. Please continue to pray for those impacted directly by COVID–19 and for the swift development of effective vaccination and medication.

The information on the following pages details the latest parish directives from the Diocese of Wollongong regarding COVID–19 and our role in preventing its spread in our communities. We will always act in accordance with the guidelines of health authorities and update our advice as necessary.

The parish directives should be considered in conjunction with current government advice regarding indoor public gathering limits of 100 people, as well as hygiene and appropriate social distancing practices recommended to minimise virus transmission, including COVID–19.

Yours in Christ

Most Rev Brian G Mascord DD
BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG

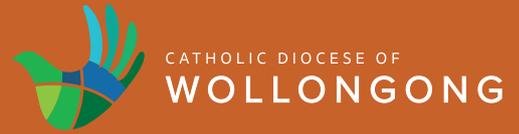
19 March 2020

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Parish directives in response to coronavirus (COVID-19)

AS OF 21 MARCH 2020



MASS ATTENDANCE

Effective **Saturday 21 March 2020**
in the Diocese of Wollongong:

- All public masses 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).
- Churches will, as far as possible, remain open for private prayer.
- Priests should consider continuing to publish their weekly parish bulletin online with advice and a weekly homily/reflection.
- 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 based on pastoral need, but should be deferred if possible. 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

During Lent, we especially want to offer people the opportunity to experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Giving people access to this sacrament is an important and essential way in which we minister the healing and merciful love of God. The Second and Third Rites of Reconciliation are not to be used.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation according to the First Rite will continue to be celebrated. To help minimise the risk of exposure, the principles of social distancing are to be applied.

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 smaller event in accordance with current Government limits of 100 people and social distancing guidelines.

FUNERALS

Funerals should be small with close family and friends in attendance and must be in accordance with current Government limits of 100 people and social distancing guidelines.

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.

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Parish directives in response to coronavirus (COVID–19)

AS OF 21 MARCH 2020



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
WOLLONGONG

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.

OTHER MINISTRIES TO BE SUSPENDED

Communion to the sick and housebound by extraordinary ministers of holy Communion should follow current guidelines set down by NSW Department of Health. Extraordinary ministers of holy Communion must refrain from visiting the sick and housebound who have been diagnosed or suspected of having COVID–19, or if the minister themselves have underlying health issues that may endanger their own wellbeing.

All parish meetings are to be suspended at this time.

SOCIAL DISTANCING AND HYGIENE

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

- Good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene.
- Distancing of at least 1.5 metres.
- Self isolation if diagnosed with COVID–19 or when exposed to symptomatic or diagnosed COVID–19 persons.