



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

Prot: 20154:MMsp_1102

20 March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Pastoral Letter to the People of the Diocese

I write as your Bishop to update you on the impacts of COVID-19 and measures that we are taking in response to this crisis facing our nation and the world at this time. These are incredibly challenging times in our nation, our communities and our Church.

I have been receiving the various pastoral stances of my brother bishops in response to the instruction from our Prime Minister. The majority of bishops have cancelled all Masses within their dioceses.

After much prayer and listening to my priests and people, I have decided to make the following announcement for the good and health of the faithful and our priests. For the wider community, from all that I have heard from health professionals, the seriousness of the virus and its effects on people can be devastating. The COVID-19 virus is moving through the community at an exponential rate and advice from the Government is to limit all gatherings.

Therefore, I have decided to suspend all public Masses and liturgies throughout the diocese until further notice. This will include all Holy Week ceremonies. I also wish to advise that the obligation of the faithful to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation is dispensed.

The Sacrament of Baptism, Weddings and Funerals are limited according to government regulations, which presently stands at 100. I would encourage you to limit the size of these gatherings to immediate family members in accordance with this requirement from the Federal Government.

The celebration of daily Mass privately by our priests will continue in the churches and all of us will be praying for all our people.

I would urge all of you to keep Holy the Lord's Day by reading the scriptures, praying and connecting with the online Mass from St Joseph's Cathedral. **I will be saying Mass each day at 12 noon here in Rockhampton, Monday to Saturday and 9.30am Sunday, and I invite you all to join with me.** The online link is <https://www.youtube.com/user/StJosephsCathRton>.

I have asked all our priests of the diocese to join with me at this same time by saying Mass privately from their respective locations. I invite you to join with me in prayer each day as I celebrate with all the priests of the diocese and the faithful so that we may pray together. I ask that, in particular, we pray for our health professionals, our emergency services personnel and all involved in the decisions being taken as our nation responds to the COVID-19 virus.

Bishop Michael McCarthy

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During this time, the Diocesan Office will continue to function so all services from Bishop's House will continue and all personnel are contactable by phone and email.

The Catholic Education Office will continue to monitor the school situation and our Diocesan Director for Catholic Education, Leesa Jeffcoat, who is working closely with relevant authorities from Queensland Health and the Department of Education, will communicate directly to Principals regarding Catholic school operations. CentacareCQ ministries will continue to provide services to their people during this stressful time.

The Sacramental Program and the Sacraments will be suspended for this year and hopefully we will be able to celebrate First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation with our young people in 2021.

Our churches will continue to remain open wherever possible and I encourage us all to make time for private prayer in our churches.

My priests are available to you by telephone and contact numbers are printed on parish bulletins. They will remain available for the Sacraments of Reconciliation (by appointment) and Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum. With the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the required distance of 1.5 metres will be required for any interactions within the church.

With respect to the forthcoming Holy Week and Easter liturgies, these will be live streamed direct from our cathedral at the usual times for these ceremonies.

Joy Philippi, Executive Officer – Mission, along with a couple of our priests, is preparing resources for you to use at home on a Sunday.

I know these times are hard and for me this has been one of the hardest letters to write to you, my dear people, since becoming your Bishop. I am reassured by the words of the prophet Isaiah; 'I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you'. I pray that our God is with us during this time. May we offer all of our prayers for the people who may contract this virus and I pray that Mary the Mother of God, together with the patron saint of our diocese, St Joseph, will be our strength during this time of crisis. Please be assured of my prayers and the prayers of all our priests and for our pastoral care and concern for you at this time.

I ask that you all are aware of, and look out for, each other. That could be a phone call or email, or connect with your neighbour and all of those who live in our midst. These restrictions will place an enormous burden on our families, and everyone. As we isolate more, we will miss the social interaction and impacts on employment may cause financial stress.

Let us offer our rosaries each day for the sick of our community and for our continuing ability to be able to fight this virus. Also for our scientists and medical researchers who will look for new ways to curb the spread of this virus. Please also keep in prayer our health care workers and all in our community who will support our frail and elderly and sick people.

For those who are able, please keep up to date with happenings via our website (www.rok.catholic.net.au) or the Diocesan Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/RockhamptonCatholic/> or search for Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton)

Sincerely yours in Christ



Most Rev Michael McCarthy
Bishop of Rockhampton

Bishop Michael McCarthy



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

Most Reverend Michael Fabian McCarthy
By the Grace of God and the Authority of the Apostolic See
Bishop of Rockhampton

Decree On the Dispensation from the Obligation of Sunday Mass

Canon 87 §1. A diocesan bishop, whenever he judges that it contributes to their spiritual good, is able to dispense the faithful from universal and particular disciplinary laws issued for his territory or his subjects by the supreme authority of the Church.

At this moment, with the spread of COVID-19 through our communities and world, it is appropriate holding to the importance of the central mystery of our faith to relax the obligation tied to this most sacred rite during this time of pandemic. This lifting of the obligation to attend Mass in no way reduces the command to keep Holy the Sabbath. There are many ways to accomplish this, but as the Code of Canon Law states, "If participation in the Eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or for another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful take part in a liturgy of the word if such a liturgy is celebrated in a parish church or other sacred place according to the precepts of the diocesan bishop or that they devote themselves to prayer for a suitable time alone, as a family, or, as the occasion permits, in groups of families."(CIC can. 1248 §2)

It is only appropriate that with many of our parishioners in the vulnerable categories for this virus and many others questioning their health or worried about the spread to a vulnerable adult they care for that we relax the obligation.

I, the undersigned Bishop of Rockhampton, do hereby pronounce, declare, and decree that the Sunday obligation to attend the Holy Mass is suspended until further notice

Given at Rockhampton, Queensland, Diocese of Rockhampton, this twentieth day of March 2020.

Most Rev Michael McCarthy
Bishop of Rockhampton

Rev Andrew Hogan
Notary

Bishop Michael McCarthy