



*For all things give thanks.*

1 THESS 5:18

## UPDATED CLERGY DIRECTIVES FROM BISHOP BRIAN MASCORD as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19)

AS OF 23 MARCH 2020

To my Brothers in Christ

Last night, 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 today, 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 last night, 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 (as directed in my statement on 19 March 2020).
- Baptisms, funerals and weddings on church premises are to cease from midday on Monday, 23 March 2020.
- 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. If Viaticum for the dying is celebrated this is done according to the procedures set out in my previous directives on 19 March 2020.

Exceptions to the directives in this statement will be granted **only** in the following circumstances, and remain subject to the government’s latest social distancing requirements:

- Funerals will occur at the graveside with only immediate family in attendance.
- Memorial services can be held at a later date when restrictions are lifted.
- Weddings and Baptisms will only be allowed where there is a genuine and urgent cause for the sacrament to occur.
- Reconciliation can be made available by appointment with a priest and will occur outdoors in accordance with social distancing requirements (one person per four square metres).

Again, I cannot overstate the importance of every one of us playing our role in slowing the spread of COVID-19. It is our duty as Catholics to care for the vulnerable in our communities. This means putting our faith into practical action by taking every possible step to care for ourselves and those around us. If you still hold any doubt about the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic, please look to the tragedies unfolding in Italy, Spain, China and elsewhere.

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Under *Public Health (COVID-19 Public Events) Order 2020* (the Order), in conjunction with section 10 of the *Public Health Act 2010*, any priest or Diocese of Wollongong staff member who fails to adhere to the ministerial directions in this statement may be subject by government authorities to fines and terms of imprisonment, including:

- Individual fines of up to \$11,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment with a further \$5,500 for each day that the offence continues.
- Corporate fines of up to \$55,000 with a further \$27,500 for each day the offence continues.
- Any person who does not comply with the directives in this statement will be personally liable for the fines attached to breaches of the Order.

Please remember as per my statement on 19 March 2020, all faithful in the diocese are currently 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).

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

Yours in Christ



**Most Rev Brian G Mascord DD**

BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG

23 March 2020