



Bishop of Geraldton

Thursday 19 March, 2020

**Statement from The Most Rev Michael Morrissey
on revised and temporary changes to be implemented within the Diocese of Geraldton
in relation to Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

Dear Fathers, Sisters, Pastoral Leaders, Principals and Leaders of Agencies

On Wednesday 18 March 2020, the Prime Minister expressly communicated a *'ban on non-essential gatherings of persons of one hundred or greater in indoor areas'*. The government's existing ban on non-essential outdoor gatherings of five-hundred persons or greater, which came into effect on Monday 16 March 2020, remains in effect. I commit the Diocese of Geraldton to the support of, and compliance with, both of these government directives and their associated and instructive public health advice.

The Western Australian and Federal Governments continue to issue ongoing public health advice in relation to COVID-19. The Diocese of Geraldton continues to be guided by this advice through our ongoing commitment to monitoring any threat posed by COVID-19 to Catholic communities across our vast Diocese.

I write to share with you a revised and expanded series of directives which come into effect today, **Thursday 19 March 2020**. These directives are in addition to the previously issued directives to the Diocese of Geraldton of **Monday 2 March 2020** and **Tuesday 17 March 2020**. The Diocese of Geraldton is closely following the directives of the Archdiocese of Perth. The website of the Diocese of Geraldton has a dedicated COVID-19 webpage in which all statements from the Diocese of Geraldton, and supporting public health advice, can be found. You can access the Diocese of Geraldton website via the following link: <https://www.geraldtondiocese.org.au/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19>

You can access the Archdiocese of Perth website via the following link:

http://perthcatholic.org.au/Our_Archdiocese-Archbishop-Latest_News-2020-NOVEL_COVID19_Revised_and_temporary_changes_to_be_implemented_within_Archdiocese_of_Perth.htm

The following directives apply to the clergy, religious and the lay faithful of the Diocese of Geraldton. These directives should be appropriately and immediately communicated verbatim within parishes, Catholic Education Western Australia, Diocesan ministries, and the broader Catholic community.

- **Temporary Suspension of the Public Celebration of the Mass & Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion**
All public Masses and Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion at all churches and chapels across the Diocese of Geraldton will be temporarily suspended from receipt of these directives on **Thursday 19 March 2020**. This temporary suspension of public Masses within the Diocese of Geraldton is in place for an initial period of two weeks between **Thursday 19 March 2020** and **Wednesday 1 April 2020**. Subsequent revisions and advice will be given prior to Wednesday 1 April 2020 in relation to this temporary suspension.
- **The Sunday Obligation** for the faithful does not apply during this time of emergency.
- **'Mass on Demand' (Online) and 'Mass for You at Home' (Television)**
 - **Online:** 'Mass on Demand', a daily service of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and CathNews can be accessed online at:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYRq7AjVimr-hcHFJD_HVaQ
 - **Free-to-Air Television:** 'Mass for you at Home ' is shown at 6.00am every Sunday morning on Channel 7.
- The Bishops and Priests of Australia will continue to celebrate Mass in private for all the people entrusted to their care.
- **Accessibility to Churches and Chapels**
Parish Priests, Pastoral Assistants and Administrators, in consultation with their communities of worship and the directives of public health advice, will put in place provisions for churches and chapels to remain open for private prayer, with the possibly of Eucharistic Adoration.
- **Celebration of the Sacraments of the Church**
The following temporary directives are to be observed in relation to the celebration of the Sacraments of the Church:
 - **Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals** will continue until further directives are issued.
 - I direct that each gathering must conform to the government issued bans for indoor and outdoor public gatherings, and the relevant public health advice in relation to the practices of social distancing.
 - I advise you to specifically consult with relevant funeral homes directly when arranging funerals to ensure you are aware of, and adhere to, their specific policies, especially those around limiting the size of gatherings at funerals to less than one hundred people.
 - **Reconciliation:** Priests will continue to provide opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, according to Rite 1 (individual confession and absolution).
 - The celebration of **First Reconciliation (school-aged children and others), First Holy Communion (school-aged children and others) and Confirmation (school-aged children and others)** will be temporarily suspended.

- **Prayer Resources for Individuals and Families**

The Diocese of Geraldton will be providing a series of prayer and worship resources for individuals and families to use within their homes for the period in which these directives are in effect. Weblinks to resources are available on the Archdiocese of Perth's Centre for Liturgy website: <http://liturgy.perthcatholic.org.au/> and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference website: www.catholic.org.au/coronavirus

Additional links and suggestions for prayer resources will be regularly placed on the Archdiocese of Perth website in the COVID-19 section: www.perthcatholic.org.au

Ministry of Communion to the Sick, Elderly and Housebound

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, the *Australian Health Protection Principal Committee* (AHPPS) is placing limits on visits to vulnerable groups. Those who minister communion to the sick, elderly and housebound (Clergy, Acolytes and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion) are directed to review the AHPPC'S latest updates and recommended measures to assist in protecting vulnerable people from COVID-19. The advice of the AHPPS can be found here: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-public-gatherings-and-visits-to-vulnerable-groups>

Celebration of the Easter Triduum (Thursday 9 April – Sunday 12 April, 2020)

In response to, and support of the government's ban of indoor gatherings of one hundred persons or more, the celebration of the Easter Triduum must be examined. Subsequent advice and directives will be issued in advance of the celebration of the Easter Triduum. I will celebrate the Chrism Mass privately.

Pastoral Letter to the Faithful of the Diocese from The Most Rev Michael Morrissey

On Friday 20 March I will issue a pastoral letter to the people of the Diocese of Geraldton. The daily development of public health advice, escalating global responses by civic and religious leaders, as well as the global impact on our sisters and brothers across the world continues to develop. The formal directives provided by myself in recent weeks have sought to provide you with relevant and preventative strategies, as well as guidance intended to responsibly safeguard both community health and wellbeing. My forthcoming pastoral letter will seek to more fully respond to the wide spectrum of needs which exist for the people of the Diocese of Geraldton during these challenging times.

Public Health Advice

Additional information and access to daily health alerts can be obtained from the Australian Government's Department of Health: <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

Launch of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Campaign

The Australian Government's Department of Health has launched a national campaign to inform all Australians about the coronavirus (COVID-19). A national campaign has launched to inform all Australians about the coronavirus (COVID-19). The campaign aims to reduce the risk to individuals and families by enabling them to make informed decisions and to take up health recommendations. The campaign resources can be found at: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/launch-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-campaign>

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources

The Australian Government's Department of Health provides a collection of resources for the general public, health professionals and industry regarding COVID-19, including translated resources. I

would ask that you make your respective communities and ministries aware of the existence of these resources which can be found at:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-resources>

I assure you of my continued prayers and practical support as together we as a Diocese seek to continue to witness and proclaim our shared Christ-centred hope within a global context that is collectively seeking to respond to the uncertainty and reality of COVID-19.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ M. Morrissey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev Michael Morrissey
Bishop of Geraldton