



A LETTER FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF VICTORIA

13 March 2020

Prayerful greetings to the people of God across Victoria,

You would be aware of the precautionary measures underway in light of changes to the *novel coronavirus* (COVID-19).

Following this afternoon's decision of the governments of Australia, all organised non-essential large gatherings (of 500 or more) are recommended to cease from **Monday 16 March**. In our circumstances, this includes the celebration of Mass and other liturgies that bring together significantly large numbers.

We believe that this is a good and measured decision, and should be understood as a responsible and precautionary step to protect the most vulnerable amongst us, especially our elderly, the infirm and the very young.

As Christians, our priority at all times is the care and safety of our people. To assist in this, we want firstly to encourage you to take all precautionary measures to care for your own health and well-being, and that of those around you. If you feel you are vulnerable to COVID-19, or are generally unwell; are caring for those who are unwell; or think you might be at risk; you are dispensed from your Sunday obligation from this time.

If you are unable to be present at a celebration of the Eucharist, we encourage you to participate in other ways such as time in personal and family prayer, reflecting on the Scriptures, making a spiritual communion, or participating in a Mass online (<http://bit.ly/MassOnDemand> or <https://melbournecatholic.org.au/Mass>).

Please keep in regular contact with your family, neighbours and members of your parish communities as best you can.

We encourage our priests to continue to celebrate Mass for the spiritual good of God's people, the intentions of the faithful and the alleviation of the present crisis. We also encourage the clergy to make themselves available to visit individuals, especially those who are unwell and vulnerable. This includes viaticum and all the opportunities for healing through the anointing of the sick and Reconciliation.

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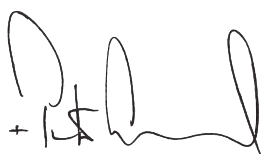
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As advice is received over coming days, there are likely to be further steps taken, which may include the suspension of public celebrations of Mass and other liturgies.

Let us continue to pray and care for one another, exercising a more intense ministry of spiritual closeness and care for our neighbours in the days and weeks ahead.

Thank you for your cooperation in helping us implement some of the pastoral recommendations and public safety measures in each parish, for your prayers and for your continued resilience in trusting God's Providence and deliverance.

Sincerely in Christ,

Handwritten signature of Peter A Comensoli, consisting of a stylized 'P' and 'A' followed by a cursive name.

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE

Handwritten signature of Paul Bernard Bird, starting with a cross symbol followed by a cursive name.

Most Rev Paul Bernard Bird CSsR MA, DD
BISHOP OF BALLARAT

Handwritten signature of Shane Mackinlay, starting with a cross symbol followed by a cursive name.

Most Rev Shane Mackinlay
BISHOP OF SANDHURST

Handwritten signature of Patrick Michael O'Regan, starting with a cross symbol followed by a cursive name.

Most Rev Patrick Michael O'Regan
BISHOP OF SALE