



18 March 2020

*To the People of God in the Diocese of Broken Bay*

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

The historic and momentous times in which we live have impelled the Australian Government to issue today new preventative measures to limit the transmission of the COVID-19 coronavirus as a matter of public health emergency.

A public health emergency of the kind that we are experiencing is a rare event. Today the Prime Minister reminded us that an event such as the COVID-19 outbreak has not been seen for 100 years. Given the directions provided by the Government and after a most careful consideration of the circumstances of our own Diocese and its various parish communities, it is with great regret and a heaviness of heart, that I share with you the following:

Effective from Friday 20 March, in the Diocese of Broken Bay:

1. **All public Masses are hereby suspended until further notice.** Accordingly, this includes a dispensation for all the Faithful in the Diocese from the obligation to participate at Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation (cc.87 §1; 1247). It will be possible to celebrate the weekday Mass for Thursday 19 March, The Solemnity of St Joseph provided that the congregation does not exceed 100.
2. **The celebration of Holy Mass by the priest privately is to continue** and may include, if possible, the assistance of an adult minister. Previously scheduled intentions, including the Sunday Mass *pro populo* may be fulfilled in this manner.
3. The Faithful are encouraged to keep the Lord's Day holy and celebrate Sunday as a domestic church by taking time to pray together as a household (c. 1248 §2).
4. **The Sacrament of Baptism:** Baptisms are still to be celebrated provided that the number attending does not exceed 100. It is important that thought be given to providing families the option of postponing the Baptism of their child. Those families who wish to proceed with the celebration should be advised to limit the number of family and guests attending (preferably immediate family and godparents only). Baptisms must be staggered so that only one child is baptised in the one event, with the water refreshed for each ceremony.

**MOST REVEREND ANTHONY RANDAZZO BISHOP OF BROKEN BAY**

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5. **The Sacrament of Confirmation:** The Government's announcement today will impact on the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation and the schedule for the same. I will consider how to attend to this in the coming weeks. All programmes of preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation should be suspended until the schedule can be reviewed.
6. **Funerals** in a church remain possible provided that the number in the congregation does not exceed 100. In accepting bookings for funerals, it will be important that Parishes work with the Funeral Director to so ensure this. The advice is that those attending should be limited to immediate family. Some Funeral Directors are already making arrangements for live-streaming of the funeral so that the number of people in the church is kept to a minimum.
7. **Weddings:** It may be that weddings be postponed. However, should a wedding proceed it will be limited to the same provisions of no more than 100 in the church.
8. **Sacrament of Reconciliation:** Our churches are to remain open for the availability of the First Form of the Rite of Confession in the usual way. The Second Form of the Rite of Confession should be suspended during this time.

I am aware that a number of our Parishes have suspended their programmes of preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This has been effected in accord with the principles applied to school gatherings. Some of our Parishes, however, have already completed their programmes of preparation and are ready to celebrate the Sacrament. In this event, the following advice is offered:

  - a. It would be unfortunate, having completed the programme, that the momentum for the celebration of the Sacrament be interrupted.
  - b. A gathering of people for the Sacrament – in the Second Form of the Rite- should be suspended as it is most likely families will express significant concern about this.
  - c. As an alternative, children, supported by their parents, might be invited to individual Confession in the church over a period of some hours on a scheduled day, so that the number of people in the confined space of the church is kept to a minimum.
  - d. If this is not possible due to local circumstances, then the liturgical celebration should be suspended to a later time in the year.
9. **Sacrament of Anointing.** In the celebration of the Sacrament, priests are given permission to lay on hands by holding them above rather than upon the head. Anointing the forehead is sufficient
10. **In respect to the forthcoming Holy Week and Easter Liturgies** I am currently considering how best these may be celebrated in the current circumstances and will advise in the coming weeks. I will discuss this with the Council of Priests which is to meet next Tuesday 24 March.

**11. As the community of the Church in Broken Bay, I urge you to pray.** It has always been our tradition to turn to God in prayer when difficulties arise, especially when a health emergency of this kind effects so many people. I commend to you in a particular way the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Rosary, which is a Marian prayer, has Christ at its centre. When we pray the Rosary, we meditate upon the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary. In the words of Saint John Paul II, *“With the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty of the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.”* (Rosarium Virginis Mariae I)

As you pray the Rosary, I encourage you to ask for the grace that we need in our Church and in our world at this time. Be confident in your prayers and trust that the Mother of Our Lord will accompany you and lead you to her son, Jesus. Recall the words from the *Memorare* prayer, and be inspired not to lose hope: *“Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession, was left unaided.”*

The Rosary is a marvelous prayer that can be prayed alone, in families, or in small groups. Through this marvelous prayer, may Mary’s motherly compassion keep our whole family safe from every danger. Through her intercession may all the people of Australia be sheltered from harm. And may people everywhere profit by the voice of Catholics united in prayer.

My brothers and sisters, we are living in uncharted times with implications about which we are uncertain. It is essential that our communities of Faith remain beacons of hope during this difficult and challenging time.

**It is important that our churches do not close** and that they remain open for prayer and personal devotion. There are many ways by which a small number of people in our parishioners may still wish to gather, remaining compliant with the law – for small group Rosary, for Exposition and Benediction, for the Way of the Cross. Indeed, I encourage small groups to use our churches for prayer, especially on a Sunday when the Blessed Sacrament may be exposed for Adoration, according to the norms governing such a practice.

Our diocesan Office for Evangelisation is currently preparing pastoral resources for use in the face of the limitations for gathering.

It is also important that our Parish offices remain open and be available for our parishioners. It is critical that all our parishes consider the most creative ways by which to retain communication with their people.

In naming this emergency, it is essential that each member of the community takes responsibility for maintaining good personal hygiene. It is also very important that those members of our community who require assistance: the young; the elderly; people with disabilities; the poor and the sick; the homeless; are cared for and not abandoned.

It is also vital that we remain good and responsible citizens. Please do not panic or fret unnecessarily. By remaining calm and adhering to Government Health recommendations, we play an important role in the community, as together we are vigilant in our attempt to keep all people safe and healthy.

Over the coming weeks, the personnel of our Diocese will continue in their contact with you and ensure that you are fully apprised of any developments which we are constantly monitoring.

Sincerely yours in Christ.

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

Most Rev Anthony Randazzo DD, JCL  
Bishop of Broken Bay