

Office of the Bishop



18 March 2020

Dear People of the Diocese of Townsville

I communicate once again concerning the Novel Coronavirus or COVID-19. Directives have already been put in place and I trust all parishes, in particular, are implementing the temporary liturgical changes and other precautions.

As of today, the Federal Government has prohibited all indoor gatherings over 100 people and all outdoor gatherings over 500 people. Some parishes may be impacted by the latest changes and should be making changes to their celebrations to accommodate the ban, e.g. moving celebrations outside or limiting the number in attendance. A considerable number of our parishes will be impacted in the case of upcoming Holy Week and Easter celebrations. Priests and Pastoral Councils should begin making plans now for a change to their ceremonies and have measures in place if the regulations change again.

However, I do intend to act now in respect of those who are 70 years and older and those who are sick and infirm and who have underlying health issues, e.g. compromised immune systems.

From this weekend I hereby dispense the elderly, as described above, and those with chronic conditions that place them at risk from the corona virus from their obligation to participate in Sunday Mass. My concern always is for all parishioners, but at this stage I think our most vulnerable (over 70s and those with chronic or compromised immune systems) should be carefully considered.

If this group chooses to attend Mass then I ask you to practice the directives of this Diocese that are in place. It is important to restate that if you have a cold or 'flu or generally feeling quite unwell, then you must not attend the celebration of Eucharist until you are better.

Our priests will continue to pastorally care for you in these times regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We all need to care for each other and this is why I am acting in this way. Therefore, if you are unable to be present at a celebration of the Eucharist, I encourage you to participate in other ways such as a time in personal and family prayer, reflecting on the Scriptures, making a spiritual communion, or participating in a Mass on-line from the Sacred Heart Cathedral [youtube.com/user/SacredHeartCathTSV](https://www.youtube.com/user/SacredHeartCathTSV) or <http://bit.ly/MassOnDemand>. We need to think of others even if we feel uncomfortable with the changes.

I pray for the victims of Novel Coronavirus and thank you for your understanding and patience.

With every best wish,

MOST REV TIMOTHY J HARRIS
Bishop of Townsville

REV RODNEY T WARD
Notary

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The Catholic Church is a member of the National Council of Churches in Australia. The Diocese of Townsville is a member of Queensland Churches Together.
The Townsville Diocese acknowledges the traditional owners of the land in the Diocese.