



A letter to the Clergy in the Diocese of Broken Bay

Wednesday 13 May 2020

Dear Fathers and Deacons,

The past seven weeks have been some of the most extraordinary in the experience of the Church in Australia. Since 19 March, we have not been able to gather for Mass through our ordinary Eucharistic assemblies, and since 23 March our churches have been closed. These historic developments have assisted in keeping the people of our country safe, and it has been a remarkable blessing that we have not experienced the devastation of the pandemic seen in other countries.

Nonetheless, the situation has placed a great stress on the life of our parish communities. I take this opportunity to thank you again, for the innovative and creative ways in which you have sought to keep the bonds of community alive and active during this time. I thank also our Diocesan Office for Evangelisation for the many resources they have provided to enable us to do this. I express my gratitude too, to the five priests who have made themselves available to be chaplains for COVID-19 patients: Fr Vincent Trung Nguyen, Fr Anselam Lakra, Fr Gzregorz Skulski SDS, Fr Shiju Simon OSH, and Fr Baby Thomas CFIC. They have now completed training in this ministry from St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst.

On Sunday 10 May, the Premier Ms Gladys Berejiklian announced the NSW Government's response to the Federal Government's announcement on Friday 8 May, regarding a three-step plan to ease social and economic restrictions imposed to address the transmission of the COVID19 virus.

In respect to our own context, we can note the following which is possible from Friday 15 May 2020. Each of these provisions is contingent on practising social distancing of 4 square metres per person and hand hygiene through the ready use of sanitiser.

- Churches are able to be open for private prayer, with a limit of 10 people in the church at any one time.
- Religious gatherings, either formal or informal, are permissible inside churches for groups not more than 10 people. The names of each person at the gathering must be recorded.

MOST REVEREND ANTHONY RANDAZZO BISHOP OF BROKEN BAY

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- Weddings may be permitted for a group of 10 people. Further clarification received from the NSW Premier's Office has been received advising that the couple and the celebrant are not part of the group of 10 people. Therefore it is permissible for a wedding to include the celebrant, the couple and 10 guests
- Funerals may be permitted for groups of 20 people indoors and for 30 people outside, practising social distancing of 4 square metres per person and hand hygiene through the ready use of sanitiser at church entrances.

This is encouraging news for us and we welcome our capacity now to re-open our churches. And I direct that all our churches open accordingly as from 15 May 2020 or as soon as possible thereafter.

Clearly, the limit of 10 people for gatherings continues to create challenges for the celebration of Masses at which ordinarily, many more people would attend, even for a weekday Mass. However, this does not mean that such celebrations are impossible. It may be possible, for example, to celebrate twice or several times a day, a Mass for which 10 people could register in advance. If people were invited to register for a Mass over a two or three weekly roster schedule, many hundreds of people would be able to participate in the Eucharist again. People may still not be able to attend Mass weekly, but they would be provided the opportunity to attend Mass perhaps once a fortnight, or once every three weeks or once a month, given the size of the parish community. In the implementation of any arrangements, it remains very important to avoid any sense of favouritism or inequality amongst parishioners.

Given that the situation of each parish is different in terms of numbers of priests to celebrate multiple Masses, it will be for each Parish Priest/Administrator to determine how such a registration/roster system might best work in each community. **However, at the service of this development, with this letter, I hereby revoke, effective Friday, 15 May 2020, the Decree issued on 18 March 2020 suspending all public Masses in the Diocese of Broken Bay.**

Given that it is possible for only a very small number of people within the parish to attend Sunday Mass - even if registered/rostered over the course of several months - the suspension of Sunday obligation remains for all the Faithful. It may be that to ensure parity amongst the Faithful, that the live-streaming of Mass on Sunday is retained as the most workable option for the time being. Again, each Parish Priest will need to make the best determination in regard to this, given the nature of their communities.

The introduction of Step One for the easing of restrictions also allows us the following considerations:

- The Sacrament of Baptisms may be celebrated with greater capacity, as up to 10 people may participate in the celebration of the Rite. We need to continue to have only one family present at a celebration of the Rite each time.



- The Sacrament of Penance may be celebrated again according to a parish's normal schedule. Physical distancing can be maintained by the use of a fixed grill or divider.

Through this period, it will be important to observe the following:

- Holy Water stoops should remain empty.
- Markers should indicate distancing between people during the Communion Procession.
- The use of Hymn books and the passing of collection plates should be avoided.
- Common areas such as parish morning tea facilities should remain closed. Areas of the church that have been most frequented should be regularly cleaned with sanitiser.

I understand a number of parishes have made enquiries with regards to the celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation. The celebration of Confirmation in parishes must continue to be on hold for the time being until such time as the restriction on numbers allowed to gather indoors are eased, more likely in Step Three. Please note I intend to write to you separately and in more detail, with regards to the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation in the coming weeks.

It is difficult to know how long Step One of the Three Step process for recovery will last. As announced by the Federal Government, each Step will be evaluated in three to four-week intervals. Step Two only allows an increase of attendants at Masses to 20 attendees. Step Three increases the number to 100 attendees. Subsequently, it will be some time yet before our parishes can return to their normal schedule. However, we should not delay in utilising the opportunity that is even now presented us in the most engaged way possible, to re-build our communities of faith.

As the situation continues to unfold, I will offer further advice.

May the Lord protect and guide you as you lead our people in faith and charity.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

Most Rev Anthony Randazzo DD JCL
Bishop of Broken Bay