



**Diocese of Plymouth**  
From the Office of the Bishop

18 March 2020

Dear Father / Deacon,

It is with a heavy heart that I write to you to communicate the attached Decree notifying you, and our people, of the suspension of Masses, and pastoral gatherings, in the Diocese. This has been agreed by all the Bishops in England and Wales. I attach a message from the President and Vice President of the Conference. You will be conscious that these are unprecedented times that we are living through and we must all do what we can to protect everyone, and especially the most vulnerable and elderly.

I am aware that this measure hits us all very hard, striking to the heart of our priestly identity. It is a time to remember, in the face of this darkness, that "the mercies of the Lord never come to an end, they are new every morning, great is His faithfulness" (Lamentations 3; 22-23). He will show us His face in many ways and will continue to guide and strengthen our faith. We must just trust Him.

There are some practical points, I would like to share with you.

- Do please continue to visit the sick. If you are over seventy, or have an underlying health problem, which means that you will be cutting social interaction then can you please inform the Dean and this Office ([Emma.Neville@prcdtr.org.uk](mailto:Emma.Neville@prcdtr.org.uk))
- I am asking the Deans to put together a list of those priests who do not fit into those categories and therefore are able to cover for our brothers. This will be particularly important for when we have to visit those with the Virus, either at home, or in hospital. I ask you to be sensible and not to put yourself or others at risk. There is guidance available from hospital Chaplaincies concerning visits to those with Covid-19 in hospital.
- Our schools are under particular pressure at this time. You will appreciate that it is a Government responsibility as to whether they stay open or not, but I know you will give them support, in this time of uncertainty.

- I am arranging that Mass can be online from the Cathedral every morning at 11am. Either I, or one of the priests, will celebrate that and give a small reflection after the Gospel. It will be available through the Diocesan and Cathedral websites.
- Every evening at 4.30pm there will also be a time of prayer online. If you are willing to go on a rota to lead that prayer, again from the Cathedral, then please let us know ([Emma.Neville@prcdtr.org.uk](mailto:Emma.Neville@prcdtr.org.uk)).
- I hope that both of these measures will help us all to remember that our surest hope is prayer to God, and gathering like this, virtually, as “one diocesan family” will I am sure, be important for us all. It is, of course, also true that during this time we must “storm heaven” for the sick and dying, for the bereaved, for those working in health care and for those seeking a vaccine.
- If the parish has any particular online presence, and particularly if the parish has the ability to live-stream, then please let us know here, via Fr Louis or Emma.
- We must support the most vulnerable and elderly in our parishes. Some helpful suggestions will soon be on our *Caritas Plymouth* pages of the website.
- It would be good if a parish felt able to coordinate a list of healthy volunteers, who would be willing to visit, or shop, for those who are not able to move from their homes, during this period.
- I invite you and your parishes to use the resources for home liturgy available on the Bishops’ Conference website.
- A suitable prayer to help people make a ‘spiritual communion’ is ‘My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.’

Please share this letter with your parishioners. I will be in contact regularly by email and let us keep one another especially in prayer.

Yours devotedly,



Rt Rev Mark O'Toole  
Bishop of Plymouth