



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

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25 March 2020

Feast of the Annunciation

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation and we listen to the Angel Gabriel speaking the words of God to Mary and to us; 'do not be afraid; you have won God's favour.' The same words of God as spoken through the Prophet announcing the news of Jesus' coming and was called by a name which means God is with us. God is with us these days and invites us into the space not to be afraid as our God is with us.

I write this letter the morning after the Prime Minister announced changes to the way we will all gather in response to the COVID-19 virus. With this letter, I convey my prayers and my thoughts with you all. I invite you all to join with me on the live stream Mass at Midday, Monday to Saturday and at 9.30 am on Sunday, as we pray as a Diocese together.

Last night, the Prime Minister in the press conference was very clear in announcing more measures in the response to the growing pandemic of the COVID-19 virus.

All churches are now closed.

The Prime Minister also directed that the only activity that may happen in a church are funerals for up to 10 people - including the priest and the undertakers and mourners.

Queensland Health went on to define non-essential services, which included baptisms and weddings.

Therefore I direct the following for the Diocese of Rockhampton:

Churches

Churches are to remain closed. Mass will not be celebrated publicly.

Other celebrations such as Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, prayer gatherings and Stations of the Cross are not permitted.

I encourage you to pray at home. Please do not congregate in homes and in churches. The Prime Minister was very clear on this aspect.

I would ask that you all respect this directive from the Prime Minister as to go beyond this directive is breaking the law and placing the health of yourself and members of the community at risk.

Bishop Michael McCarthy

Funerals

Funerals may take place with a maximum of 10 people present and following the current social distancing rules. When planning for funerals please liaise with the priest and the funeral director to ensure that this is adhered to. This number also includes the funeral director/s and the Priest.

There is a long-standing tradition in the Church that when people cannot be present at a funeral, the priest carries out the Rites of the Church, and then at a later time when the family can gather, celebrates the Funeral Mass with the family and friends of the deceased. This may be another pastoral support during this period and Pastoral Councils might explore this with the pastor to be part of the annual parish calendar, without setting a firm date. Again, Pastoral Councils could assist the pastor with a plan for when the pandemic is over, to support families and give them an opportunity to grieve and bid farewell in a way beyond what is possible at this time.

Weddings

I have asked all of our Priests to personally contact any couples who have been preparing to celebrate Marriage in the next six months to discuss if they wish to proceed with the ceremony according to the current restrictions.

Weddings may only take place with the minister, bride and groom, and two witnesses present (5 people). Please adhere to the current social distancing rules.

Baptisms

Baptisms are not permitted at this time.

If it is a case of necessity in danger of death, please contact your Parish Priest to make immediate preparations.

Confession

At this time of preparation for Easter, many of the faithful will wish to celebrate this sacrament of forgiveness. Please contact your Parish Priest to make private arrangements with him for the sacrament.

Holy Communion

Holy Communion will be taken to the sick and dying as Viaticum by priests alone.

Parish Groups

All Parish groups are to suspend their gatherings until the current government restrictions are no longer in place.

Private Celebration of Mass by our Priests

Our Priests will all be celebrating Mass privately each day in the Church and will be praying for all of the faithful in their Masses.

The Triduum

This will be celebrated privately by our Priests in the Parish Churches and without participation of members of the faithful.

Parish Offices

Parish offices will remain available to the parishes by telephone and email and will endeavour to remain in contact with you during this time. Please feel free to contact your Parish office.

Please be assured of all of my prayers during this time and remembrance in my daily masses in Rockhampton and available online <https://www.youtube.com/user/StJosephsCathRton> .

Yours sincerely

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

Most Rev Michael McCarthy
Bishop of Rockhampton