



Dear Clergy, People and Friends of the Diocese of Wangaratta

Our observations, available information and the latest news shared from the Department of Health regarding rapidly growing numbers of cases of Coronavirus, announcements by the Prime Minister and the closing of some State and Territory borders as well as the shutdown of all non-essential activities in NSW and Victoria requires of us to 'pause' all services within the Diocese with immediate effect.

I alluded to this in my latest Ad Clerum to the Clergy and now decree this until further notice - **Church services and all other Church group activities are not to be held until further notice.**

Working within the regulations as announced last week regarding social distancing allowed most of our congregations to operate yesterday.

Some might find this difficult, but it is necessary and we as God's Church need to be leaders in caring for ourselves and especially for all those who are vulnerable and who make up most of our community.

It is important to ensure that we keep regular contact with one another within our respective faith communities and I ask especially that clergy ensure regular contact and communication with members of their congregations through the various methods available. I would also want to encourage the use of social media and the live streaming of services of Morning Prayer and the Holy Eucharist with only the clergy person present and one or two others if possible. Sermon thoughts, bible studies or other Lenten activities should be emailed to those who are connected. Although other suggestions have been made, the pausing of services and other activities is the safest option and in line with the new State and Commonwealth laws.

I am sure that in cases of great pastoral need, your clergy person would respond, but please be aware that it may not always be through physical attendance. Funeral and planned wedding services will be affected, and we will offer guidelines soon depending on the situation.

I will be in communication with our Legal Team and the Leadership Team about Synod and other activities planned for later and will advise the decision. I suspect that Synod will not take place during May. Plans are already underway to postpone General Synod. I am sure that the Lambeth Conference will also be postponed.

These are indeed trying times and best practice for us now is to follow the evolving government and state regulations. With 1098 confirmed cases to date, even living in a rural setting does not preclude any of us of being infected with the virus.

There is no doubt that the economy will be hard hit, including our Churches. It might be very difficult for some to recover from the loss of income and I ask for your consideration in supporting your local congregation financially through direct deposits



Ad Populum

From the Bishop

22 March 2020

or bank transfers, or to ensure that monetary donations are forwarded to the Church. We are aware that many will be affected personally and that this will also influence giving within Parishes.

I have often spoken about a 'Church without Walls' and during this time we have the opportunity of exercising and strengthening our faith through prayer, the study of God's word and to be that sense of support to one another from within our own homes. As mentioned, clergy will endeavor to provide as much as they can through available options and resources and I hope that we will be able to do something on the Diocesan level as well.

I hold before you a verse from Jeremiah 31:3b – "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you." God is faithful in loving and loving in being faithful and calls us all to be the best we can under these trying circumstances. As people of faith, we pray with one heart and voice that God may sustain us in our own faithfulness and love.

Please be assured of my prayers for you as we continue to pray for each other.

Clarence E Bester