



**DIOCESE OF
PALMERSTON
NORTH**

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20 March 2020

Dear parishioners

In the current COVID-19 emergency it is very important that we play our part as good citizens. It is our Christian duty to do everything we can to protect ourselves and others from harm.

As Catholics we have many gatherings and practices which potentially pose a risk this situation, especially to the elderly and those whose health is compromised in some way. The government's restriction of indoor gatherings to 100 people requires us to take action immediately. For the duration of this health emergency, the following instructions are to be implemented in all parishes and chaplaincies (and where they apply, in schools) throughout the Diocese of Palmerston North.

Masses and public liturgies

All public Masses and liturgies in the Diocese are suspended from 20 March until further notice, both weekday and weekend Masses. Some churches will be open for private prayer, and social distancing should be observed if people are doing this. Since public Masses are suspended in the Diocese until further notice, all Catholics in the Diocese are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass (Canon 1248). You should stay home for your safety and the safety of others. Many people may feel sadness at not being able to participate in the Mass, but you should not feel guilty for not going to Mass. We are looking into livestreaming some Masses but it may be even more fruitful for families and households to gather together to reflect upon the readings for Sunday and to make their own forms of worship. I have asked all the priests of the Diocese who can to celebrate Mass every day privately for the intentions of the people and the alleviation of the crisis.

Funerals

The immediate family of the deceased (which must be fewer in number than 100 or the Ministry of Health's future minimum number) may gather for the funeral rite, taking great care to practice social distancing. There are to be no prayer vigils the day before a funeral. The Rite of Committal will take place at the cemetery with the immediate family only. There will be no Requiem Masses at this time.

Marriages and Baptisms

Marriages without Mass and Baptisms may take place with immediate family members, provided they follow the regulations established by the Ministry of Health. Marriage preparation courses are suspended.

Parish activities

All parish gatherings are suspended. This includes meetings; sacramental programmes; the conferring of First Holy Communion, First Reconciliation and Confirmation; Lent programmes; RCIA programmes; and the Second Rite of Reconciliation. Reconciliation will be available by appointment or at set times if it can be conducted in a safe way.

Visits to the sick and housebound

Your pastoral team will make arrangements to ensure that those who are sick or housebound receive spiritual care. They will also keep in contact with those who are in self-isolation, and you should advise them if you are in this situation.

Parish Offices

Parish offices may make their own decision about remaining open, but must enforce social distancing with any visitors. If necessary the office may be closed to visitors but be accessible through its phone and email systems. There will be a way to contact a priest.

This is a Lenten journey without precedent. In all its challenges there will be opportunities for spiritual growth as a community; for finding new ways of being Christ to one another; for caring for those who are marginalised or disadvantaged; for the discovery of new gifts in our midst; for rediscovering the heart of community and family. For each of us personally there may be opportunities for discerning what is really essential in our spiritual journey; for finding a new appreciation of those who are very familiar; and for deepening our prayer and the ways we pray.

You are all in my prayers. Please look after yourselves, and care for one another and your neighbours.

Yours sincerely in the Lord

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Cardinal Dew". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠ John A Cardinal Dew
Apostolic Administrator
Diocese of Palmerston North