



Wednesday 13 May 2020

Members of the Catholic community in Victoria,
The Catholic Dioceses of Melbourne, Ballarat, Sale and Sandhurst

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Throughout this situation of the Coronavirus pandemic our prayers and solidarity have been with you all, and will continue to guide the challenging decisions we have been called to make.

Despite the many weeks of worry and social restrictions, we are delighted that as of 11.59pm yesterday, Tuesday 12 May 2020, churches in Victoria may now be open in certain circumstances.

This opportunity for small gatherings and for some quiet moments of prayer in the sacramental presence of Our Lord is a gentle first step in the right direction, and rightly a moment of rejoicing for God's people. We are pleased to work constructively with our communities to make appropriate adjustments. Strict restrictions still govern our actions due to the risks of COVID-19 and we are all being asked to show patience and fortitude.

Each Diocese is communicating with their parishes about how various ministries, including sacramental care, will be conducted in this first stage of the easing of social restrictions. We wish to be fully compliant with the directives that apply across Victoria, so that we ensure the protection of elderly and vulnerable people, and work together for the common good of our communities.

The conditions under which a church can be open include a collection of contact details (for the purposes of contact-tracing if it becomes necessary), strict monitoring of numbers, ongoing hygiene requirements, publicising the scheduled times for private worship, and public worship limited to ten people at a time.

Arrangements for liturgies and access to churches while ensuring these conditions are met will vary, depending on the facilities and resources that are available in each particular community. We recognise that deciding on these arrangements and putting them in place is not straightforward, and we ask for patience and understanding during this time.

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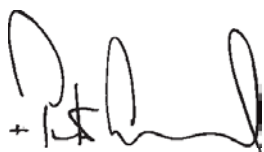
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This new stage of restrictions is subject to changing guidance that we receive from the State Government authorities, and we are advised this will be reviewed at the end of May.

After a difficult time for all of us, including many new pressures on families and great challenges for healthcare and emergency workers, we share in the disappointment that social restrictions are likely to continue for some time.

Nevertheless, we act with one accord in doing what is most prudent and loving for the sake of those most susceptible to the virus. We rejoice that Christ is with us and will walk with us as we begin the long journey out of the current stage of restrictions.

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus,



Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE



Most Rev Paul Bernard Bird CSsR MA, DD
BISHOP OF BALLARAT



Most Rev Shane Mackinlay
BISHOP OF SANDHURST



Rev Peter Slater
DELEGATE OF DIOCESAN ADMINISTRATOR,
SALE