



OFFICE OF
BISHOP WILLIAM WRIGHT

Saturday 30 May 2020

To all Clergy, Parish Leaders and Leadership Teams

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

RESUMPTION OF PUBLIC MASSES IN CHURCHES

I believe that the latest regulations in NSW make it possible to resume the celebration of Mass in our churches in most cases. You will not be surprised that it is my wish that the people may once again be able to celebrate Mass together wherever that is possible and as soon as it is possible, but with every care being taken, not merely to keep the rules but also to protect the health of all concerned to the utmost of our ability.

The Vicar-General, Fr Doohan, has done a sterling job of keeping on top of the unfolding COVID-19 regulations day-by-day. His detailed presentation of the latest government order will again provide you with all you need to know about regulations pertaining to private prayer in churches, confessions and the celebration of the various sacraments. All that I wish to do in this letter is to summarise the main factors in being able to resume Sunday and/or weekday Masses in your churches.

1. **THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO CAN ATTEND:** The upper limit, as you know, is 50 persons plus the necessary ministers. The most recent health order doesn't mention the '4 metre rule', so the number of people that can attend is simply the number the church can hold while maintaining social distancing, up to fifty. Members of a household can, as before, sit together.
2. **DECIDE WHAT IS PRACTICAL:** Really, this is a matter of working out how to limit the numbers to 50, or less if the church can't socially distance 50. A booking or roster system? Adding an extra Mass? This is a genuine pastoral challenge to some places because, clearly, being turned away from the church door won't be a satisfactory experience for our faithful. Some places might manage a video link to an adjacent hall, meeting- or classroom. There has to be some pastoral plan for limiting numbers wherever that could be an issue.
3. **PROVIDE THE NECESSARY RESOURCES:**
 - a. Sanitiser at the entrance. (Having one entrance will help in monitoring numbers.)
 - b. A means for each congregant to record their name and contact number as they enter, and probably someone to monitor that and the social distancing of any queue involved. Probably the priest should be at the entrance to help explain whatever may arise.
 - c. For Sunday Masses, a means of taking a collection that doesn't involve passing a plate. Bags on broom handles or boxes people walk by?

4. **CLEANING ARRANGEMENTS:** Materials and people to disinfect the pews and anything else people are likely to have touched or remained near during Mass. Clearly this would mean there would have to be quite some time for cleaning between a Mass and any other subsequent use of the church, e.g. a baptism.

These seem to be the big issues: MAINTAINING THE LEGAL NUMBERS, HAVING THE NECESSARY EQUIPMENT AND SYSTEM FOR ITS USE, CLEANING AFTERWARDS.

Now, it is over to you to decide what is or isn't possible in your parish church(es). As far as I am concerned, Masses may resume from now on, IF THE NECESSARY CONDITIONS CAN BE MET. There will be uncomfortable moments when good and faithful people want you to make just this little exception to the rules for them, but they will have to be brought to understand that pleasing them will place at risk the whole possibility of having Mass, not to mention putting their fellow parishioners at risk.

Having decided what you are going to do, in the next few days, please let the bishop's office know your plan by email, in the form Andrew has provided. If the big 4 requirements above can be met, Mass will be possible. I know you will be under pressure to get up and running ASAP. That, indeed, is what I want, but with a big emphasis on the P, the possible. Have the ducks lined up before you start. And, the big things being in place, please also review Andrew's advice on other details, such as having no holy water in the stoups, sanitising your hands before Communion, keeping distancing in communion lines, no hymn books etc.

Some wonderfully creative pastoral initiatives have been taken during lock-down. Now we need to show just as much imagination and sensitivity in the phase of the 'new normal', which will inevitably not be quite as normal as some people would wish.

It's Pentecost. May the Spirit guide you in all wisdom and renew the face of our own little bit of the Earth as we go through this latest re-birthing of the Church.

With great thanks and sincere regards,

Yours in Christ,



Most Reverend William Wright
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle

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