

Statement from the Bishop of Ballarat concerning Sunday services and the coronavirus.

In the Diocese of Ballarat ordinary Sunday services will be held as usual for the time being. Unlike the Bishops in NSW, Tasmania and Bendigo, I do not ask you to suspend worship at this time. However we will take seriously the major recommendations of the General Synod task force. This includes trying to keep a distance of about 1.5 metres between people in the Church buildings. Parishioners are encouraged to receive the Sacrament in one kind only. However, the Chalice of wine will not be banned. If anyone wishes to drink from the Common Cup, they may do so. No meaning will be intended or inferred by those who do or do not receive the Chalice. Those who receive the Sacrament in one kind receive all the spiritual benefits of receiving in both kinds.

Parishioners who have cold or flu symptoms should refrain from attending Church. All parishioners should feel free from "the Sunday Obligation".

Personal contact should be avoided as much as possible – this includes the Peace. It is wise to avoid sharing food after services. Similarly, it may be necessary to reschedule parish fetes and to develop extra safety policies around Op Shop ministry and emergency care ministry

Pastoral services that might involve more than 100 people will require special sensitivity; e.g. it may be necessary to change wedding dates, or to encourage small celebrations for Holy Baptism, Confirmation and Funeral services. In some cases, you may only be able to offer a graveside service if a large crowd is likely to be present for a funeral. Remember to be pastorally sensitive to the families involved in these situations.

The Ceremonies of Easter will need to be modified to meet GS guidelines and the simplified services by the Liturgy Commission are recommended (see G S website - liturgical resources).

The clergy and authorised Lay Ministers are asked to be particularly vigilant concerning hygiene requirements around daily masses, and Communion in the home.

Services in Nursing Homes/ Aged care facilities are cancelled in accordance with the relevant institutional policies.

Clergy will be particularly careful to respond to anxious or stressed parishioners, and to make electronic contact with those who do not come to church services, for whatever reason. Many elderly folk who may not use a computer are very likely to welcome a pastoral telephone call.

Most extra services e.g Harmony Week, Pilgrim Supper on Passion Sunday evening, Refugee Week, will normally be rescheduled for later in the year or cancelled for this year. Lady Day will be observed on 25th March, but there will be no hospitality following the Mass and Presentation of Badges in the Cathedral.

The Diocesan Finance Committee reminds all people that the costs of each parish will not diminish during this time. Parishioners are encouraged to arrange Direct Credit payments to the Parish accounts if they have not already done so.

Above all, we are to remain people of faith and hope, who are confident in the good purposes of our loving God.

With blessings,

Garry Weatherill
Bishop of Ballarat