



**St Mary MacKillop**  
Catholic Parish  
ORAN PARK

**Our Parish Implementation of Step One**  
**Update on the Bishop's directives for easing of COVID19 restrictions**  
**Friday 15 May 2020**

*"Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming" (James 5:17)*

My dear fellow parishioners

As our Bishop Brian reminds us in a letter, he made available today, and that is available in full on the diocesan website ([www.dow.org.au/covid-19](http://www.dow.org.au/covid-19)) "COVID 19 remains present in the community and is highly infectious. We need to continue to act with prudence, calm and hope".

As many of you would be aware, from articles in the media, as well as social media posts, the NSW government has announced that certain restrictions are being eased from now, including allowing **"religious gatherings and places of worship to have up to 10 worshippers at one time"**.

While some dioceses around Australia, including those dioceses that neighbour our parish of Oran Park/Leppington, have decided to open churches to gatherings of no more than 10 people and to celebrate Masses where no more than 10 worshippers can attend at a time, in his communication to the clergy and people of our diocese, **the Bishop has determined that at this time the public celebration of Mass will remain suspended and churches will remain closed. This will be reviewed by the Bishop and his advisors in two weeks.**

As the Bishop has said this decision has been made for the safety and wellbeing of all involved - parishioners, clergy, parish staff and wider community.

He has also made this decision believing it to be the more prudent course of action at this time, given the limitations on the number of people who could attend and the associated logistics. The Parish Leadership Team and I concur.

These next few weeks will be an opportunity for our parish community, like other parishes, to prioritise *preparedness over timing*.

In other words, it's not as easy as just opening the church building and counting off people entering ten at a time. We need to discern the best way we can ensure the safety and wellbeing of parishioners, clergy, parish staff and volunteers, along with how we manage the logistics associated with monitoring churches to ensure a limit of 10 people, as well as undertaking constant cleaning of the churches, recording the details of those who enter the building that is now required etc. Bishop Brian has said that he, and the team at the *Office of the Bishop*, will be communicating with us during this period of time to assist us in preparing for the next steps in this process.

Once again let us not forget that during this time when we cannot physically gather for the celebration of the Mass, we can keep holy Sunday by setting aside some time for prayer at home, reading the Scriptures of the day, participating in Mass on television or online, and asking God for the graces we would normally receive in Holy Communion (canon 87 §1, canon 1248 §2).

**Going back to the Bishop's update to us today, the current directives that he has previously issued remain in place:** this means the celebration of baptisms in our parish will continue to be deferred for the time being, along with the cancellation of our normal Reconciliation and Mass schedules. We continue to explore how to best make these sacraments available and will update you further. The only changes are in relation to the attendance numbers for weddings and funerals: Weddings are limited to **no more than ten (10) guests** plus the couple, celebrant and assistants. Funerals are limited to **no more than twenty (20) mourners** indoors and **thirty (30) mourners for outdoor** ceremonies excluding celebrants, funeral directors and assistants.

Our Parish Leadership Team and I 'virtually' met today via Zoom for our fortnightly meeting, and we support the Bishop's decision. We understand that this time has been challenging in many ways, however, it is also proving to be a time of grace and opportunity. The Bishop is encouraging us to continue to engage with our parish through means such as our live-streamed Masses and other initiatives that have been implemented in the life of our faith community.

**I know some will be asking, when will be able to gather in larger numbers for Mass, or when will sacramental celebrations like Baptisms and 1<sup>st</sup> Holy Communion be held?** Early next week I will be sending out a more detailed update to families who booked in for 2020 baptisms that have been postponed, as well as an update to families whose children are participating in our 2020 sacramental programs.

**It is difficult to know how long Step One of the Three Step process for recovery will last.** As announced by the Federal Government, each Step will be evaluated in three to four-week intervals. Step Two only allows an increase of worshippers to 20 attendees. Step Three increases the number to 100 worshippers. Subsequently, I am sure it will be some time yet before our parish can return to the large gatherings that we had prior to the covid19 restrictions. However, we should not delay in utilising opportunities that are even now presented to us to continue to nurture the faith in our *domestic churches* (aka our homes) and to encourage and inspire one another to continue to engage with our spiritual life during this time.

As I have said several times in recent weeks, **suspended Masses does not mean God is suspended, or our faith is suspended.** We must together learn and develop new ways to nourish ourselves spiritually, especially when we can be weighed down by the anxieties and tumult of the world.

In conclusion, I would like to once again personally thank everyone who is participating in our weekend Masses online and other online faith formation opportunities, or who have been participating in our various parish groups and ministries that are now meeting virtually online. Your great response to these online Masses and other online opportunities to gather has given the Parish Leadership Team and myself a renewed sense of joy and hope that we can and will rally, that this virus will not defeat us, and that we can come up with positive and creative ways to live out OUR VISION to be Church – the Body of Christ – through this crisis.

Patience is a virtue we have almost lost in our hectic world of instant gratification. **Our Parish Leadership Team is urging us all not to lose patience** but to continue to experience the presence of the Lord in our homes and in our prayer and in the joys and messiness of our lives. We are not keen to have a lottery of which 10 parishioners may attend Mass. Until such time as we can come back together in larger numbers as a faith community, let us learn a new awareness of togetherness as we **patiently wait**. Let us ask our patron St Mary MacKillop to intercede for us.

Be assured of my thoughts and prayers for you all, many times each day.

With Easter blessings

Fr.  


Fr David Catterall PP (and the Parish Leadership Team)