



18th March 2020

Pastoral Letter and Statement of the Scottish Bishops re. Covid-19 Virus

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In this time of trial we, the Bishops of Scotland, wish to send you a word of reassurance and encouragement. We are all facing much uncertainty, anxiety and an unpredictable future. This situation touches on every aspect of our lives, individually and collectively.

Sacred Scripture calls us repeatedly not to fear and to look to the help that comes to us from above.

We are called to support one another in every way we can, especially those who are most vulnerable, through age or underlying conditions. Even in the midst of any necessary “distancing” we must stand by each other.

We ask you to pray for the sick, those caring for them, for those in positions of responsibility with difficult decisions to make, indeed for our whole country and the entire human family.

Most of all, we are being asked to put our trust in the living God who has created everything to be and to flourish and whose providence guides the course of world events. We put our trust in our Lord Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, and the true physician of our souls and bodies.

During this Lent, especially, let us all take the opportunity to deepen our relationship with God. As your bishops and with our priests and deacons, we assure you of our continuing commitment to your spiritual, pastoral and sacramental needs.

We want to maintain and foster the life of faith in every way we can, while also being informed by the advice and guidance of Government and health professionals. Over the centuries the Church has often been a source of comfort in times of trial and transformed sadness and fear into confidence and peace. We want the same to happen now.

General Secretariat

Given the latest official advice to reduce the spread of Covid-19, we have taken the difficult decision, respecting the prudential judgement of each bishop, to suspend Holy Mass in public for the time being from Thursday 19th March, the feast of St Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, after all Masses. As pastors of the flocks entrusted to us, we are responding to an unprecedented crisis in modern times and assure all those whom we lead that this decision has not been taken without much prayer and discernment.

Priests will continue to celebrate Holy Mass in private with the particular intention of praying for those suffering from Covid-19 and for those who care for them.

However, our Churches will remain open for personal prayer and we would encourage parish priests to welcome individuals who seek consolation and encouragement from the Lord. We also ask our priests to be available for the reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick and Holy Communion as and when they are needed, especially for the sick and housebound.

For the celebration of baptisms, funeral Masses and weddings we would ask that only close family are invited.

We wish to remain close to and with our priests who are on the front line of pastoral care, as we remain close to the Lord, sure of that victory of Christ we celebrate at Easter.

We encourage you where possible to access the live streaming of Holy Mass from the parishes in our country which have that facility.

Our celebration of Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum may indeed be curtailed by this government advice and we will seek means of celebrating those most important three days of the Mass of the Lord's Supper, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil online so that they may be accessible in your own home. We will have the opportunity to be with one another in spirit and in prayer. Moreover, the Holy Father, Pope Francis will be celebrating the Sacred Triduum online from St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and that celebration will unite us in prayer with all Catholics throughout the world.

We ask you to join with all the Churches in a National Day of Prayer this Sunday 22nd March, Mothering Sunday. It seems appropriate that as Catholics we pray together the Rosary, the prayer of our Blessed Mother Mary, at 12 noon, asking Her intercession for our country and our world in this time of need.

On this coming Sunday also we were due to have our collection for the SCIAF Lenten Appeal, and it would be good if we could still show our concern for the poorest in the world, even in our own time of need, by sending our donations to SCIAF or making them on-line to the SCIAF Wee Box Appeal at www.sciaf.org.uk."

General Secretariat

As Government advice changes, we will update our guidance accordingly in the hope of restoring the public celebration of Mass. In the meantime, please ensure that no one feels abandoned in our communities and do what you can in practical terms to help those who are alone.

We entrust all of you, especially those already afflicted by the virus and all health care professionals, to the care of Our Lady of Lourdes, Health of the Sick.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+ Hugh Gilbert

Bishop of Aberdeen, President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland

+ Leo Cushley

Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh

+ Philip Tartaglia

Archbishop of Glasgow

+ Joseph Toal

Bishop of Motherwell

+ Stephen Robson

Bishop of Dunkeld

+ John Keenan

Bishop of Paisley

+ William Nolan

Bishop of Galloway

+ Brian McGee

Bishop of Argyll and the Isles