

Further Guidance for the diocese of Kerry, 28 March 2020

In the light of the most recent Covid-19 restrictions, and having consulted with the other Bishops of the Cashel Province I am now publishing further guidelines on arrangements regarding Coronavirus. I do so mindful that the work of clergy and pastoral workers is included in the category of “social care” mentioned in the provisional list of essential services. It is the intention of the authorities to make more specific reference to clergy and pastoral workers in the definitive list that may not be available until Monday.

- All those over 70 and others who are medically vulnerable are to be shielded or cocooned, therefore all clergy and religious as well as Diocesan and parish lay staff such as sacristans within this category of “cocooned” should stay at home.
- Pastoral Areas are to coordinate back-up services for those who find themselves in situation of cocooned personnel and ensure that they receive moral support and to see that their needs are met.
- Church buildings are to remain closed until April 12th, apart from the fact all are required to stay at home, it is practically impossible to ensure that surfaces in church buildings would be cleaned regularly, and that the numbers entering churches would be supervised.
- Visits to the Blessed Sacrament can always be done even at a distance from the church building in an act of recollection and prayer at home. The practice of spiritual communion is recommended to all who cannot receive the Eucharist at this time.
- Funerals: the government guidance to Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at this point is that the arrangements hitherto in place continue: funerals with small attendance and safe distancing. Further guidance will come early next week.
- Priests or other church personnel (sacristan, cantor, volunteer) over 70 or with underlying vulnerable medical conditions are not to be involved in funeral liturgies or prayers. This is in line with the regulation regarding “cocooning”.
- **Funerals of those who die from the virus.** When someone dies from the virus the public health authorities will have carried out a thorough search of everyone who had close contact with them and these people will be in isolation. They will not be at the funeral. Priests who officiate in any way at these funerals need to be extremely careful regarding public health advice (social distancing, hand-hygiene etc.). **(In practise, to date all such funerals have had liturgies in the cemeteries only).**
- Masses are to continue, where possible, to be transmitted via webcam etc. The Mass should be celebrated by the priest alone without reader or cantor.
- Webpage, Facebook etc. should be used for talks and messages to inspire encouragement, hope and prayerfulness. Where possible, technology-based simple pastoral services should be enhanced.
- Priests who come under the “cocooning” category should celebrate Mass privately in their homes.
- All baptisms and weddings are postponed until further notice. If, because of emergency, a baptism must be celebrated, the shortened emergency rite should be used with ‘other rites to be supplied later’.

At this difficult time, it is good to remember that the whole Church of Christ is present in every Diocese and that each time Mass is celebrated or the Divine Office prayed, it is done in union with and on behalf of the whole diocese. Our Lady help of the sick, pray for us. St. Joseph, pray for us, St. Brigid, pray for us. St. Patrick and St. Brendan, pray for us.