

Update on COVID-19 implications for Masses

The recent easing of restrictions for community gatherings for religious purposes by the Victorian Government has offered the opportunity for public Masses to be celebrated with very strict limitations.

In response to this easing of restrictions, the Archbishop has permitted Masses to be celebrated with a strict limitation of 10 attendees whose names and contact details are to be recorded and the information stored, and with a provision that the church be cleaned and sanitised after each Mass. Of course sanitisers, disinfectant wipes and safe disposal sites need to be available, and social distancing needs to be exercised by all in attendance.

Suggestions for determining **who** are the 10 to be admitted into the church for Mass are either by invitation, or through the use of an Internet booking forum such as “TryBooking”, or by having a person at the door admitting 10, and then turning anyone else away.

Similar strict limitations have been applied for people coming into the church for private prayer such that there can only be a maximum of 10 people at any one time and regular sanitation requirements need to be exercised. This is to be supervised constantly and the names and contact details of all who enter the church need to be recorded and stored.

The Archbishop has left it to the discretion of each Parish priest to determine the appropriate pastoral response in his own parish.

I have decided for a number of reasons that for the time being in our 3 parishes we will continue the current practice of providing an uploaded Sunday Mass on YouTube through our Parish Websites and FaceBook pages. You can go directly to YouTube and type in: “St. Mary’s Greensborough Masses” and access all of the Masses and video reflections that have been uploaded.

As your Parish priest, I have a real difficulty in giving access to only 10 attendees, because it means having to turn away anyone else. I would suspect that most of the people who would most yearn to come to Mass would be the more senior members of our community – often the most vulnerable and susceptible to acquiring an infection. I have a sense of a duty of care for them and wouldn’t want anyone to be infected with any virus or bacteria. The senior members of our communities are also the least likely to know how to navigate an Internet Bookings forum. On top of this, to ensure the sanitation of the church after each Mass is really beyond our capacities. For similar reasons, I have decided that for the meantime, our churches will continue to be locked and not be made available for private prayer.

I would hope that the second stage of the easing of restrictions provided by the Government would permit a greater number of parishioners to come to Mass, that our churches might be opened for private prayer and celebrations of the Liturgy of the Word, and that news of this would be made public at the end of May.

In the meantime, please access the Sunday Mass on our FaceBook pages or Websites. (The Archdiocese is currently rectifying problems on some parish websites, so if you can’t access the Mass on the Website, go to the Facebook page). I have been celebrating the Sunday Mass at one of our four churches. Lenin provides a video reflection on the Sunday Gospel, and a

text of Tao's homily is also available. There are also links to reading material and podcasts that have been deemed appropriate at this time.

There are still restrictions on numbers for all other liturgical celebrations such as baptisms, funerals and weddings, but you are most welcome to make enquiries or book for a time later in the year.

Our Faith Development Team has decided that we will celebrate First Reconciliations, First Communions and Confirmations in Term IV, in October/November. Dates are yet to be determined.

Anyone wishing to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation is welcome to do so by making an appointment with one of the 3 priests.

Compared to many other countries, Australia has fared very well because of decisions made by our governmental leaders that have focussed on the health of people. I think we can be very grateful to them for their wise judgements.

I can only say that I miss seeing you and look forward to opportunities when we can be together again, and especially for the celebration of Mass.

Until then, if there is any way we can be of assistance to you, please contact your Parish's office by phone or email and we will do our best to address your needs.

Please learn and embrace the positive experiences you may have at this time in order to take them into the future.

Take care of yourself and those you love, and keep safe.

Fr. Steven Rigo (PP)