



Archdiocese of Southwark

Pastoral Letter

Concerning the Measures to be put in place Regarding Public Worship and the Celebration of the Sacraments in Relation to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic

'Our help in is the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.'

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ

I wanted to write to you personally as we face the threats posed locally, nationally, and internationally by the COVID-19 Coronavirus. For so many people, including those in our parish and school communities, this situation brings uncertainty and fear. It has the capacity to bring out both the best and the worst of our human nature. Working together, in the strength of God's grace, we must seek to ensure that the very best of our common humanity triumphs, especially for the health and well-being of the weakest, the poorest, and the most vulnerable.

The Lord Jesus commanded us to love one another and to serve after His example. (Jn 13: 12-15; 13:34) Now is the time for our love to be displayed more deeply and our service to find heightened expression. Our calling as disciples is to be salt and light to the world (Mt 5:13-16) in witness to the Gospel of Christ.

Few of us will have witnessed circumstances such as those we are presently experiencing. It is crucial that we take the necessary measures to maximise the welfare of every person and follow the guidance and requirements of our Government and Statutory Agencies.

The Bishops of England and Wales have implemented changes in how we are to practise our faith as we move forward. Details of this can be found on the websites of the Archdiocese of Southwark and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. I ask every member of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Southwark - clergy, consecrated religious, and laity - to abide by these measures until they are amended or withdrawn. They will be kept under review in the light of expert health and hygiene advice.

A major change is the cessation of public celebrations of the Mass and the dispensation of the Obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days. We will, however, endeavour to keep our churches open wherever possible so that those who wish can visit to pray before the Blessed Sacrament.

The imposition of these restrictions has not been taken lightly. As we know, the Mass is the hallmark of Catholic faith and practice. For there to be no public celebrations of the Mass, either on weekdays or Sundays, will be an immeasurable loss to all who cherish their participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. For now, we must draw close to Christ in other ways, taking consolation from the fact that the Mass will continue to be celebrated each day in our parish churches to *'advance the peace and salvation of all the world.'* (EP III) It will not, however, be possible for the faithful to attend these celebrations.

To continue to mark the significance of Sunday as the Lord's Day, I would encourage all those who are able to read the Scripture readings of the Sunday Mass and to pray the rosary. We can also make a Spiritual

Communion which prayerfully expresses our faith in Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Various forms of prayers for making a Spiritual Communion are available in prayer books and on the internet.

Our Catholic faith offers the vital spiritual support we will need to cope with all that will unfold. We can sustain our life of prayer, turning to the Scriptures, the Rosary, to novenas and litanies, using Catholic social media and internet resources to keep connected in the communion of faith. Live-stream celebrations of the Mass and other devotions are available from churches and shrines across the country and around the world. I encourage every Catholic - individuals, couples and families - to create, if there is not one already present, a simple shrine in their home, with a crucifix and religious images, to provide a focus until that blessed day when we are able to gather in our churches once more.

Thank you for everything you are doing to support your parish, school and wider community at this challenging time. Please have a special care and concern for anyone who might struggle. Be Good Samaritans to each other. Support those most in need in the best ways possible. Please shop responsibly and give to charities working with people who are vulnerable and marginalised. Speak to your families and loved ones as often as you can. Keep everyone in your prayers, especially those suffering illness, and all our NHS, emergency and social care staff.

We may be more physically separated at this time, but we remain united spiritually in Christ through the Holy Spirit in a bond of faith that cannot be broken. Our prayers strengthen our relationship with Christ, our unity with Our Blessed Lady and the Communion of Saints, and our connection with each other. No one is forgotten in the prayers of the Church.

I want to assure you of my prayers for you, for your loved ones and for your parish community. We will do our very best to provide support and information through the Archdiocesan website and social media

presence. In all that we will face, individually and together, we find our hope in Christ. He is our sure foundation, today, tomorrow, and always.

With every blessing

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by the letters 'JW' and a flourish, with a horizontal line underneath.

The Most Reverend John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark

Given at Archbishop's House, Southwark, 18 March 2020