

Pastoral Message from the Bishop

Stay Home. Stop the Spread. Save Lives.
If you have to go out, wear a mask.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Extension of Closure until at least 31 July

As a diocese we are committed to *On Being Faithful* and to discerning the way forward on the basis of the best public health data available to us at any given time. After wide consultation and prayerful consideration, I am directing that the closure of our buildings for in-person worship and other in-person activities be extended until at least 31 July. This is a deeply disappointing and frustrating development for all of us, but at this moment when we are seeing such an alarming increase in the incidence of the virus in every part of our diocese, there is no other decision for us to make.

Consequently, the restrictions that have been in place since the beginning of the closure in March remain in force. Live-streaming and recording of worship may continue with the usual restrictions of the minimum number of people present for the conduct of the service. All participants in worship are to follow the ERD commendation of wearing masks as an effective form of modelling appropriate behaviour. No other in-person activity is permitted.

There are currently exceptions to the closure in the diocese for two essential services: some day-care ministries and some feeding programmes. These ministries have specific permission from the Bishop's Office to function under strict conditions, and they may continue to operate during this extended closure. If you are running programmes of this kind, please ensure that your processes, procedures, and plans have the approval of the Bishop's Office.

If you have not yet completed a plan for re-entry and re-gathering, let me remind you that there are resources to help you emailed on Tuesdays and Thursdays each week by our Congregational Development & Vitality Team, which are also available on the diocesan website in the drop down menu under the tab marked "Ministries." I encourage you to use this time to either complete or perfect your plans, so that you are ready and well-prepared for that moment, which will come.

Let me take this opportunity to affirm the hard work of so many of our communities to ensure regular online worship and other online ministry and formation, and encourage all our people to participate in these online community activities.

I also encourage everyone to sustain your financial support of the Church at this time, and, if you can, to make a gift to your congregation over and above your usual pledge or weekly contribution. While we cannot gather in person, the ministry of the Church

continues, and our ongoing sacrificial support is crucial so that the Church's life-giving ministries may reach those in need.

Regardless of any disappointment and frustration, let us look to the future into which we believe God is leading us in hope, acting now and always for the sake of love. We bear the burden today, so that we may be all the stronger tomorrow. During this extended season of closure, there are many opportunities – for worship, for prayer, for study together, for the strengthening of our relationships and communities, and for rest. Let us not relent in our conviction, and continue to deepen our trust in the One who is faithful and who holds us in love.

I continue to keep you in my daily prayers, and ask you to keep me in yours.

O God, whom to follow
is to risk our whole lives:
as Ruth and Naomi
loved and held to one another,
abandoning the ways of the past,
so may we also not be divided,
but travel together
into the strange land where you will lead us
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

With love and prayers,

+Peter