

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS CONSEQUENT TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC (As of 25th MARCH 2020)**

The answers to the following FAQs are provided by our Parish Priest Fr Michael de Stoop. In his answers, Fr Michael quotes the Pastoral Letter to the Clergy and the Faithful of the Archdiocese of Sydney regarding the latest restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (23 March 2020) written by His Grace Anthony Fisher, OP.

### **1. Is Mass still being celebrated in the church?**

“It is with heavy heart that I announce that following the new commonwealth and state restrictions on public places, all public Masses and other communal devotions, whether inside churches or outdoors, are suspended in the Archdiocese from Sydney from 12 Noon [on 23 March 2020] until further notice. From now on our focus must be on helping people find ways to pray and nurture their faith from home.

As you know, we have done our best to maintain the availability of the Mass for as long as possible. But as I noted in my pastoral letter of 18 March, the Church in Australia was founded at a time when the Mass could not be celebrated on these shores. Following the most recent advice from the commonwealth and state governments it may seem that we are again in that situation. But where our forefathers and mothers waited for years to receive the Holy Eucharist, it will be at worst a matter of months for us. Just as prayer sustained them through those times, so can it for us today. The spirit of those first Australian Catholics should inspire us through the times ahead.

‘Mass for You at Home’ is broadcast on Channel 10 each Sunday from 6 am. There are several live-streaming and on-demand services for daily Mass both locally and from around the English-speaking world. The cathedral, some parishes and several individual priests of the Archdiocese are already regularly life-streaming Mass and other devotions; more such initiatives are occurring in response to the present crisis. Links are available at the Archdiocesan website”:<https://www.sydneycatholic.org/coronavirus-updates/>

### **2. Can I pray inside the church?**

“Clarification has been received from government that, in New South Wales at least, all churches must be closed, even to private prayer.” However, if you keep checking the Parish’s Facebook page, you will find opportunities to assist you pray with the priests in our Parish, ask questions about the Catholic Faith, seek spiritual guidance, etc.

### **3. Will any liturgical and devotional content be livestreamed to help me pray?**

The clergy in Fairfield Parish will be posting short videos featuring daily Gospel reflections on the Parish’s Facebook page. See also the answer to the question immediately below.

### **4. How can I practice my faith in my home?**

“I exhort priests, religious and lay faithful to engage in regular prayer and fasting for those who die, fall sick or are at risk from COVID-19, for those caring for the sick, seeking a cure and leading us through this crisis.”

You “may pray the Divine Office with these particular intentions and add appropriate petitions.” To pray along with the priests, you can download an app called Universalis on your smartphone, iPad, or tablet. The priests in Our Lady of the Rosary Fairfield Parish will be praying Morning Prayer every day at 9 am commencing on Thursday 26 March, which will be live-streamed on the Parish Facebook.

“All of us can pray the Rosary and other prayers regularly.” The priests in Fairfield Parish will be praying the Rosary on weekend at 8 pm, which will be live-streamed for individuals or families who wish to pray with them. In this way, we can imitate what the Christians did in the early Church: “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts of the Apostles 1:14).

### **5. Will the Easter ceremonies be celebrated in the church?**

Since all places of worship are shut down for six months, no Easter ceremonies will be celebrated in the church for the laity. The clergy will still celebrate these ceremonies in their own parish churches. The Cathedral and some parishes will be live-streaming these ceremonies. As for the Chrism Mass on the morning of Holy Thursday (when the clergy renew their Ordination promises and the oils to be used in the celebration of the sacraments are consecrated), the Archbishop is considering moving it to later in the year.

### **6. Can I book a Baptism?**

“Baptisms should be postponed for at least six months where they prudently can be. If there is a risk of death, the child should be baptised.” The arrangement of postponed dates are subject to when the Federal and State Government lifts the current shut-down of places of worship.

### **7. I have booked a Wedding. Will this ceremony still go ahead?**

“An exception to the Government’s church closure direction has been allowed for Weddings. But Weddings may now only be celebrated with ‘very small groups’ (Weddings are restricted to couples, the celebrant and witnesses) no more than five people in attendance at the church, and subject to physical distancing, hygiene and related directives. The church should be closed once the limited participants have been admitted. Disappointed brides could be promised a larger celebration after the public emergency has passed (e.g., on the first anniversary). Now that Wedding reception venues are closed, most Weddings are being postponed for at least six months. If a church is used for a wedding, pews, door knobs and other obvious contact points should be sanitised afterwards.” To meet these requirements according to the due diligence required, there will be a cost to employ a professional cleaner to carry out these sanitary works.

### **8. Can I book a Wedding?**

Weddings are permitted, but may only be celebrated with very small groups (Weddings are restricted to couples, the celebrant and witnesses) no more than five people in attendance at the church and subject to physical distancing and hygiene directives.

### **9. Can I book a Funeral?**

At this time, “funerals may now only be celebrated with “very small groups” , restricted to no more than 10 people in attendance at the church, and subject to physical distancing, hygiene and related directives. The church should be closed once the limited participants have been admitted. Grieving families could be promised a larger celebration after the public emergency has passed (e.g. on the first anniversary). If a church is used for a funeral, pews, door knobs and other obvious contact points should be sanitised afterwards.”

### **10. Is the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) still available?**

Confession is currently not available in a group setting during the pandemic. If you have any questions regarding this restriction, you can call or email the Parish Office. In the meantime, the Archbishop recommends “the continuing importance of examination of conscience and making an act of contrition. The faithful should be advised on the continuing importance of examination of conscience and making an act of contrition, and that they are dispensed from their annual duties until such time as it is practicable to fulfil them. Priests may and should respond to individual requests for the Sacrament of Penance, but may not advertise or open the church for Confessions.”

### **11. Can a priest provide the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick in my home?**

“Pastoral care of the sick, frail elderly and shut-in should as far as possible be undertaken by the clergy and in accordance with current public health advice. All ministers should follow precautions recommended by health authorities when visiting people’s homes, aged care facilities, hospitals, prisons and detention centres ... Clergy

... must be careful with respect to their own health and safety if we are to avoid exposing our people to risk and are going to be there for the long haul for people.”

12. Can Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion bring Holy Communion to the sick?  
“Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should only take Holy Communion to people’s homes if they are at low risk themselves and appropriately advised on all precautions.”

**13. Is there any way people who are not sick can receive Holy Communion during the shut-down of the churches?**

Unfortunately, receiving Holy Communion outside Mass for people who are not sick is not available during the pandemic; however, information will be posted on the Parish’s Facebook page regarding how to make a spiritual communion, and what the saints have taught about making a spiritual communion. Additionally, the Archdiocese has provided information on making a spiritual communion on the following webpage:

<https://www.sydneycatholic.org/.../OUT-0XX-01-Act-of-Spiritua...>

**14. Can I book a room in the Parish for a small prayer group?**

The Archbishop has declared “that following the new commonwealth and state restrictions on public places, all public Masses and other communal devotions, whether inside churches or outdoors, are suspended in the Archdiocese from Sydney.”

Consequently, none of the Parish’s rooms can be booked for any small prayer group activities. Nor can any room be booked for small catechetical or social activities.

**15. Is the Parish Office still open?**

Yes, but the staff are being rotated (i.e., they are taking turns in working from home) in order to practice social distancing and to reduce the chance of infecting the whole office. Irrespective of whether the staff are working in the Parish Office or at home, they can be contacted via email on weekdays.

**16. Is there a way I can volunteer in any way to help spread the Gospel during this pandemic?**

To help “the frail, the elderly and isolated ... the Archdiocese is working alongside CatholicCare to roll out a volunteer program to help the needy access groceries, cooked meals, medicine and other necessities at this difficult time.”

If you would like to assist with CatholicCare’s volunteer program, you can register your name and best contact details with Fairfield Parish’s Events and Marketing Coordinator Joyce at: [events@olrfairfield.org.au](mailto:events@olrfairfield.org.au) The Archbishop has requested that people in each parish “who are young and healthy enough to carry out these visits to the needy.” This service will provide a noteworthy means of giving witness to the Gospel: “Many of our frail and elderly will feel particularly isolated at this time, as only essential services continue to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic. A service like this is critical to not only ensuring the needy get food and medicine, but human company as well to combat long-term loneliness and isolation.”