



Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC*HS Bishop of Motherwell

23rd March 2020.

Dear Fathers and Deacons,

Religious,

Brothers and Sisters,

My thoughts and prayers are with you as we face these very difficult times.

Listening to the reports that the numbers affected by the Covid-19 virus will continue to rise in the coming days, and also the stark calls made by our political leaders that we should stay at home if at all possible and be strict in observing the required social distancing measures when in public places, I feel it is necessary to stop opening the churches in Motherwell Diocese at present. I do so with regret but in order to ensure the virus is not transmitted to anyone, especially those who are most vulnerable, through coming to pray in the churches during this pandemic. I think it wiser to take this step, knowing that a lot of provision is being put in place for the faithful to participate in the Church's Liturgical and devotional life on-line through the various social media outlets now available to us. Our clergy are making great efforts to be with you by these means so that you know we are accompanying you in prayer through these difficult days. I ask your prayers for them also as they strive to serve you as best they can, although they are at present denied your physical presence at Mass and others services. We remain closely united in the Lord and seek his help constantly in our present need.

If you wish to speak with your priest, please phone or make contact through other media. Physical contact has to be kept to a minimum but the clergy have plenty of time to be in communication with all who need help and support. If anyone has an urgent need to receive the sacraments this can be arranged with your priest. During the crisis the designated priests will attend to the sick calls to the three General Hospitals in Lanarkshire, so that the 24-hour emergency service will be fully maintained. Other visits by chaplains round the wards will not be happening, and apart from the priest on call other clergy should not be asked to visit sick parishioners in the hospitals. If you wish a sick relative to receive the sacraments, please inform the staff and the chaplain will be called.

With regard to funerals I would like to reassure the faithful that the two things that really matter for us will continue – Holy Mass will be offered in private for the repose of the soul of

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our deceased loved one, and their mortal remains will receive Christian burial, or alternatively the Rite of Committal before Cremation. In order to protect one another only close family members should attend the burial or cremation – even then prudence is necessary in deciding which family members can safely attend. If I may offer an example – if I were to die at this time I would expect the Vicar General to offer Mass for me privately in the Cathedral, and for him, the Diocesan MC, and two family members to attend the burial. I think all families should think in these highly restricted ways. Memorial Masses or services for our dear departed ones can be held in the future when life returns to normal.

I encourage you all to pray frequently for God's help and mercy in our great need, especially for those who are ill and those caring for them, and seek the intercession of Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, St Therese of Lisieux, and all the angels and saints.

With my prayers and best wishes,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ Joseph Toal". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

+ Joseph Toal