

# **Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference** **Statement on Liturgical Considerations in** **the context of COVID-19 (Coronavirus)**

## **Serving the Common Good**

As people of faith we are called to face the fears of this moment with a courage not our own and with a generous heart. God is with his people in good times and bad. Like believers in every age we say: 'If I should walk in The Valley of Darkness no evil would I fear for You are there'. In our hour of trial Jesus calls on us, his followers, to serve the common good by taking responsibility for each other and to prioritise the most vulnerable in our community ahead of our own individual wants and aspirations. At this time our first concern has to be for the elderly, the ill and those with underlying medical conditions.

As bishops we present the following directions in the light of current public health authority advice in Ireland, north and south, aware that these might have to change at very short notice.

While acknowledging that the following directives will involve sacrifice for all, we encourage a positive engagement in order that the most vulnerable amongst us can be protected and so that the coronavirus can be contained.

## **Hand Hygiene**

**It is important that hand sanitiser is provided at each entrance of the church.**

**Holy water fonts should remain empty at this time.**

**The Sign of Peace is not to be expressed by hand shaking.**

**Having received Holy Communion, and before and after distributing, the priest and ministers should sanitise their hands.**

**Collection baskets: priests are asked to provide an alternative to the practice of passing collection baskets through the congregation. The faithful are asked to continue their generous contributions to the upkeep of their parish.**

## **Receiving Holy Communion in the Hand**

**We ask that Holy Communion be received in the hand until the current crisis has passed.**

## **Sunday / Weekday Mass**

At this time the celebration of Mass on Sundays and on weekdays - including Saint Patrick's Day – will continue as normal. However, **those with underlying conditions and those who are considered vulnerable are dispensed from their Sunday obligation to attend. We strongly encourage people with such conditions to be spiritually united with their local community. Where possible they should avail of parish radio broadcasts and webcam.** While in church and as far as possible people are asked to keep a safe distance from one another, in keeping with current advice.

## **The Sacrament of Confirmation**

The celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation is a happy and joyous occasion which brings people together from far and wide. **We ask that people with underlying health conditions and who are considered vulnerable from a health perspective, should not attend the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation.**

The celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation will continue for now but may have to be postponed at very short notice in the light of future advice from the public health authorities. The anointing with the Oil of Chrism will be administered without direct touch, in a safe and appropriate manner, such as with the use of a cotton bud.

## Celebration of the Sacrament of the Sick

Concerning the pastoral care of the sick and the administration of the sacrament, the priest will use a cotton bud or surgical glove for the anointing with Holy Oil and dispose of them appropriately.

## The Sacrament of Baptism

During this time the celebrant will sign the child with the Cross without touching. Where there is more than one child being baptised, a single jug of fresh water will be blessed and used. The anointing with the Holy Oils will be administered by the use of cotton buds.

## Funerals

The community of faith will always seek to surround the funerals and burials of its deceased members with love and respect. **However, even now it is clear that people with underlying conditions, and who are vulnerable, should not attend funerals. For the same reason, when sympathising, people should *not* shake hands.**

The Church awaits official guidance from the public health authorities in the event of a deterioration in the situation. While abiding by all such advice, the Church will always stand with the bereaved and do its best to ensure a Christian burial for those who request it.

## **Con-celebration of Mass**

In light of our particular circumstances at this time, and health authority guidance, the bishops have given permission for only the main celebrant to receive from the chalice, when con-celebration is deemed necessary.

## **Reviewing this information**

We ask everyone to continue to follow the guidance of the public health authorities north and south. As the situation evolves, Church-specific information will be updated and published on local diocesan websites, on the website of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie) and on their related digital media platforms.

## **Prayer for our protection**

We ask for prayers for those affected by the Coronavirus. Placing all our trust in the Lord, and asking Our Lady to intercede for us, we invite everyone to pray these prayers:

### ***Memorare***

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided.

Inspired with this confidence, I fly to you, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother. To you I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful.

O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in your mercy, hear and answer. Amen.

*Extract from Saint Patrick's Breastplate*

Christ with me,  
Christ before me,  
Christ behind me,  
Christ in me,  
Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me,  
Christ on my right,  
Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down,  
Christ when I sit down,  
Christ when I arise,  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me,  
Christ in every ear that hears me.