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**Response of the Archdiocese of Hobart to the spread of the Coronavirus**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write to you at a time when the world faces a pandemic due to the spread of the Coronavirus. The daily news informs us of the rapid spread of the virus and a rising death toll. As you are aware Pope Francis has curtailed his public appearances and Masses have been cancelled in Rome at this time. Our government both Federal and State are announcing increasingly stringent requirements aimed at limiting the spread of the virus. On Tuesday, March 17, the State government announced a Public Health Emergency.

It is necessary that the Catholic Church take measures to protect the faithful and the wider community. The measures I am announcing are in harmony with guidelines developed by the Permanent Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference.

As Archbishop, in consultation with the Council of Priests, and receiving advice from health officials, I have taken the decision to immediately suspend the public celebration of all Masses.

This year it will be necessary for priests to celebrate each of the Easter ceremonies alone.

These measures will remain in force until public health officials advise us that public gatherings can be restored.

All Catholics are dispensed from the obligation of observance of Sunday Mass. However, there will be a number of ways in which the faithful can still honour the Lord's Day. I encourage Catholics to keep Sunday holy by setting aside a time for personal prayer.

- Parish churches will be open for visits and personal prayer at times determined by the Parish Priest. Check with your local parish for details.
- The Archdiocese will produce some spiritual resources so that the faithful can engage in times of individual prayer and reflection, especially on Sundays.

- Mass and the Easter Ceremonies will be live-streamed from the cathedral and available on the Archdiocese of Hobart Facebook page and YouTube channels. There are other opportunities to access Mass on television and online.

During this difficult time I have asked all priests to continue to offer a private Mass daily for the intention of their people and for the health and wellbeing of the nation. Priests will continue to be available to meet the spiritual needs of the people.

Priests will continue to ensure the care of the sick. However, restriction of visits to nursing homes will impede regular visits at this time. Priests will respond to any call to assist the dangerously sick and dying. The Sacrament of the Sick will be administered in homes, nursing homes and hospitals in accord with protocols produced by health officials.

In the case of a death in the family, subject to the limits imposed by government regulations, the priest will be available to be with family and offer spiritual comfort. Attendance at funeral liturgies will be limited to the immediate family.

In the case of weddings that have been already planned, the wedding ceremony will be open only to the bridal party and immediate families.

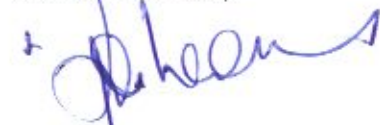
Priests will conduct baptisms where participation will be limited to the immediate family and godparents. Some parents may choose to delay the baptism until the crisis is over.

In this difficult time we entrust ourselves to the Lord who never abandons His people. We pray that we will be sustained in faith and hope. It will be our commitment to keep close to the Lord by personal prayer and acts of faith that will be our support and comfort.

As soon as health officials declare the emergency is over we will restore normal parish life.

I will carry the people of Tasmania in my heart and prayer in the time ahead, entrusting the Archdiocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Yours in Christ,



Julian Porteous DD

**Archbishop of Hobart**