



**BISHOP'S
OFFICE**

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Dear Fathers and Lay Pastoral Leaders

Greetings and all good wishes in RED Level. We almost made it to the end of January without having to change any of the protocols for the Covid- 19 Protection Framework, but as we were warned Omicron has burst in on us. Therefore, I need to write to you all to update you on some of the things that are happening and what we need to do to keep others and ourselves safe.

As we begin life in the RED level of the COVID-19 Protection Framework we need to think carefully about how we will manage the challenges ahead of us, in a way which is sustainable for everyone. Please read the following carefully and make it known in your parishes.

The Mass registration system is available again for those parishes which wish to use it to manage the numbers at Masses.

It is possible that as the outbreak gathers speed we will see a reduction in numbers at Masses because people are sick, close contacts or vulnerable because of age or health status. I encourage you to remind people that

- the dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass is still in place;
- they should not come to Mass if they have any cold or flu-like or other symptoms;
- they must obey the rules around isolating – they are dispensed from the obligation - if they are waiting for a test result or are a contact of an infected person;
- if they are coming to Mass they should wear a mask, practice hand hygiene and be very aware of social distancing.

The usual precautions will continue with Masses, no holy water, communion under one kind and only in the hand. I discourage you from having any form of singing during Masses. A choir or one person singing is technically within the rules but could result in spread of the virus and we must take no chances. Many people commented last year about the Masses in Alert Level 2 with no singing and how the silence aided reflection and prayer. This may be the opportunity for a different experience of the Mass.

There are some points specific to priests and ministers which I would like you to note:

- Priests need to wear masks throughout the Mass, except for the Eucharistic Prayer. You might like to cover the hosts during the Eucharistic Prayer with a purificator so you are not breathing on them. Be careful where you put your mask when you take it off – it should be “safe”, not just lying on the altar cloth.

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- Those conducting Liturgies of Word and Communion should wear a mask throughout the liturgy.
- If a priest is sick or has to isolate, the Masses he is scheduled for should be cancelled or replaced by a Liturgy of the Word and Communion if it is safe to do so. Finding replacement celebrants will be unrealistic as the outbreak increases, and will create a lot of strain. Only seek a replacement if absolutely essential, for example, for a funeral.
- I have cancelled the St Valentine's Day Mass and Teachers' Masses. I encourage you to cancel or postpone indefinitely any special Masses you had planned in your parish, as I believe we need to reduce our gatherings.
- Taking communion to the sick can continue at this early stage, but it should only be done by people who have received all three vaccinations. We may need to suspend it as the outbreak accelerates.

I intend to communicate with you frequently as the outbreak progresses as we may need to make changes quickly and deal with unforeseen situations. If any part of the Archdiocese is badly affected by the outbreak, please don't hesitate to suspend Masses in your parish or area, or ring me if you are unsure whether to do this. Your local knowledge will be invaluable in making these decisions.

We managed the many changes and challenges of last year, and we need to manage this new situation in a way which keeps people safe, including priests and parish ministers.

Thank you to all of you for all that you are doing to keep people in the parishes safe and well. I know that Covid continues to present more and more challenges as time goes by, and most of us would like life to continue as it was before Covid. However, this also presents opportunities to be creative in the way we minister to people and ensure that we reach out as much as we possibly can to others, especially this isolated and alone, those unwell and anxious. I keep hearing about the creative ways you are keeping in touch with parishioners and your concern for those who are lonely and unwell. Thank you again for all you are doing.

With thanks and prayers and all good wishes and blessings

Yours sincerely in the Lord

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John A Dew". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

John A Dew
Apostolic Administrator
Diocese of Palmerston North

