



# St Paul Apostle Community

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Endeavour Hills, 20 March, 2020

Dear Parishioners of St Paul Apostle Endeavour Hills

Governmental authorities around the world are enforcing wide ranging protocols in order to contain the spread of the corona virus. As a significant body within the global politic the Church needs to co-operate and assist the international health bodies in their endeavours. These precautions are meant to protect everyone, especially the most vulnerable. As I am writing this letter, the news from Italy is that over 450 people have died of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours. The dangers inherent in this virus are very real and we need to do our part in minimizing the impact of this contagion here in Australia.

The Catholic Church in Victoria have suspended all Parish Masses and this will severely impact the sacramental operations of the St Paul Apostle community. A Church without Eucharist will seem foreign to most parishioners but for many Catholics throughout the world this is commonplace. During my time in Zambia there were many isolated Catholic communities that celebrated Eucharist 3-4 times a year. These people always understood that their participation in the Eucharist was a gift, rather than an obligation. They sustained their Catholic faith via BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities) engaging in prayer, bible sharing and discussion. In short, our faith and commitment to God and our neighbor should not be threatened by the suspension of the communal Mass.

Neither our faith, nor our charity (love) should diminish during this crisis. Social distancing and self-isolation does not dismiss love for our neighbour. Safe distance but deep concern will be our motto. Please take particular note of the more senior and vulnerable members of our community and if you have any concerns please contact the parish office. In the weeks ahead we will introduce strategies that will ensure the spiritual and pastoral well-being of the most vulnerable in our community.

Just as we need to maintain our faith and our love, so too our hope. In last week's 2<sup>nd</sup> reading our patron St Paul Apostle wrote to the church community in Rome. He said that our hope is not deceptive because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. In the midst of this uncertainty we need to be people of hope. The ensuing weeks/ months may be very testing but they also provide an opportunity to explore new and maybe old ways in which we live our faith. As a Passionist Parish we know that the Passion of Jesus Christ lives in our hearts and no interruption to our normal Easter celebrations will change that faithful reality.

I would like to thank all those people who have rung the office regarding finances. Your generosity in wanting to continue your contribution during the current lockdown will be gratefully received. That said, your first commitment must be to your family. We are acutely aware that throughout this crisis many families will experience a period of financial uncertainty. The Parish and the Passionist community understand that if your circumstances do change, and the pressure to maintain your commitment increases you will need to reassess your current pledge. The Parish finance committee will meet next Tuesday to further discuss the situation.

In the coming weeks the PPC and I will investigate ways in which we can continue to nourish the faith of our community. We will look at providing safe and appropriate opportunities for private prayer, resources for worship at home, the possibility of streaming Mass from the Church, availability of Communion and Holy Water. The organization of these initiatives will take a little time and as the situation is very fluid we will have to continually adapt. I ask for your patience and support as we navigate this uncharted terrain.

Please rest assured Fr Brian and I will continue to celebrate the Eucharist, thereby ensuring the availability of Holy Communion. In their letter to the Catholic people of Victoria the Bishops stated: *Our priests will continue to celebrate Mass for the spiritual good of God's people, the intentions of the faithful and the alleviation of the present crisis. We assure our people that the Mass is being offered for you in our parishes and that while you are not physically present, you will participate spiritually and that you are close to the hearts of your pastors in the Eucharist.*

Please note that Mass online is available on the following site:

<https://melbournecatholic.org.au/Mass>

The Bishops guidelines stipulate:

**Immediate suspension of public liturgies, including celebrations of the Mass, until further notice.**

**All other gatherings are suspended.**

There are some important pastoral exceptions to these guidelines. Please note that priests remain available for anointing's and viaticum (last rites), as well as for funerals. Funerals are subject to restrictions and these protocols will be discussed with each family.

The website will be updated each week and we will explore other ways to communicate with as many people as possible.

Let us ask our Lord to guide us through this time and to keep our community and loved ones safe.

Blessings

Love

Brendan PP CP