

COVID-19 Pastoral Handbook

"Do all you can with the means
at your disposal and calmly
leave the rest to God."

- St Mary MacKillop

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Most Rev Archbishop Patrick O'Regan DD



Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Firstly let me say thank you for the warm welcome to the Archdiocese of Adelaide and how pleased I am to be here now, albeit under very unusual circumstances.

My arrival in Adelaide has been marked by border checks, a two-week isolation period, Zoom meetings and preparing for the live streaming of my installation – not your typical introduction to a new archdiocese.

But as we continue this journey together, I know that you are doing all that you can to stay connected with each other and are finding new and creative ways to nourish people's faith.

While we aren't able to have large gatherings in our churches, we are reaching perhaps even bigger numbers of people through the internet and social media.

I am also heartened to learn that our priests, deacons and lay faithful are going the extra yard to spend time with people in their parishes and communities, particularly those who are isolated and lonely. This might be a 'verandah visit' to an elderly couple's home, a phone call or dropping off a parish bulletin in someone's letter box - simple acts of kindness that mean so much to people.

I trust this handbook will be a way of sharing the different ideas that parishes have come up with to stay connected, as well as providing helpful resources for communicating with our people during these difficult times.

Finally, I thank all of those wonderful people working in our parishes and communities, in schools, aged care, health and community services for their dedication and commitment over the past months and in the days ahead.

The Scriptures remind us that Jesus is the true vine: 'I am the vine you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in them, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing.' John 15:5

Archbishop Patrick O'Regan

+ Pat O'Regan

Pope Francis prayer to Mary during coronavirus pandemic

O Mary, you always shine on our path
as a sign of salvation and of hope.
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,
who at the cross took part in Jesus' pain, keeping your faith firm.
You, Salvation of the Roman People,
know what we need,
and we are sure you will provide
so that, as in Cana of Galilee,
we may return to joy and to feasting
after this time of trial.
Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform to the will of the Father
and to do as we are told by Jesus,
who has taken upon himself our sufferings
and carried our sorrows
to lead us, through the cross,
to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.

Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God.
Do not disdain the entreaties of we who are in trial,
but deliver us from every danger,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.

"Comfort, O Comfort my people"

Isaiah 40:1a

Throughout the histories of the Jewish and Christian religions, the faithful have born traumatic events that cut them off from the source of their faith. Exile, persecution, and illness have not only harmed the faithful, but these events have also created new opportunities for communities to worship and express their faith in God.

In the 6th Century BCE, the Babylonian Exile removed the possibility for the Jewish people to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. While in exile, the people rediscovered the presence of God in all of creation, there was a significant development of the writing of scripture, and small local faith communities began to meet in synagogues. Christian persecution of the early church intensified the practice of the first Christians and helped to refine the sacraments of initiation, the Creeds, and various spiritualities.

What new threshold do we stand upon at this time in our history as a faith community? Isolated from one another, from the source of our faith, we may be in the midst of grief and fear. We may even be feeling guilty or angry at our inability to gather in worship, to receive Christ in the Eucharist and serve the community in need. Can the spiritual heritage of our Catholic faith provide any encouragement for our present situation and the continued development of our faith practices?

Comfort, O Comfort my people.

Connection

Human beings are born to relate. We are relational and we need to honour that. When we cannot connect fully, grief and loss are experienced and we try and grasp ways to stay connected.

Social media is providing new ways of connecting with family, friends and work colleagues. But one thing we are discovering is that it is not enough and this is a good thing!

Connection with others is at the heart of our faith, which is what makes this particular time of isolation all the more difficult for us. How are we to not only stay connected now, but build and grow those connections and develop new ones?

It is important to observe your longing to see someone in the flesh, your ache to hold your grandchild, your frustration at not being able to see your mates, and be curious about the feelings you have. These feelings come from being part of a tribe, and our behaviours are about wanting to show we belong.

As a Church, we are blessed that our connection comes through someone who is definitely in this world but not of this world, so to speak. We have been given an opportunity in recent months to, instead of continually looking to the outside world for stimulus, go within, and really feel the presence of Jesus. This mutual love we all share with Jesus is a great connector, it increases our longing to be together, and offers us hope that very soon, we will be.

As you read these words, please God many of us will have begun connecting more through the relaxing of restrictions. It will be important to reflect on what we have experienced, what we have learned to be grateful for, and the preciousness of actually seeing each other in person. When our dream of wanting to connect with one another at home, in the parks, in the pub and in the church once again come true, let us not take this for granted, but continue to connect as a matter of priority.

Support

We are all experiencing the effects of this pandemic in different ways at different times, so our support of each other, and our thoughts about ourselves need to be unconditional and non-judgmental.

People have different levels of resilience. While some are making the most of isolation, others may be experiencing heightened anxiety due to an inability to partake in their usual activities.

Change is one of the things people find very difficult to deal with, and a change like losing one's job, having all regular routines altered, having choices taken away about what you would like to do, can evoke an uncomfortable, or in the case of losing one's job, extreme level of stress.

There are many avenues of support happening now through St Vinnies, Foodbank, online prayer and masses, phone counselling etc., but when people have never had to accept support before, this too can be distressing.

So our support of one another needs to be accepting of the other's experience, without comparison or condition.

Other means of support could be getting in touch with your local parish for a conversation, spiritual support or direction in these times of uncertainty.

Centacare Catholic Family Services Phone Counselling Line

People struggling to cope with the chaos and fear surrounding COVID-19 can now access free phone counselling by appointment from Centacare Catholic Family Services.

To book an appointment for COVID-19 telephone counselling, please phone Centacare on 8215 6700.

Prayer

When we cannot go out, we go within, and that is the same with prayer.

Even though we have been isolated, there can still be many distractions for us at home that can lead us out of silence and away from prayer.

We don't hear the phrase much these days of the 'discipline of prayer', but like any form of exercise, it takes discipline to feel fit.

Developing a personal prayer practice, especially the contemplative traditions, allows individuals to gain a sense of peace and connection to God.

Whilst enjoying a relationship with Jesus that is different to any other person's relationship with Him, this time provides an opportunity to go deep within and discover Jesus in the silence, waiting patiently for you.

This can be done with just noticing your breathing, and gently, slowly, relaxing into Jesus' presence and sharing everything that is in your heart with Him.

This type of prayer is especially good for anyone experiencing heightened anxiety throughout this time, as the gentle breathing through mindfulness, assists in dissipating the anxious thoughts, whilst raising your awareness of Jesus' complete presence.

You might also spend time in prayer in churches (adhering to restrictions), pray with scripture, the Divine Office, make an Act of Spiritual Communion or even by finding God in nature.

Family and Parish Based Catechesis Office

During this time resulting from the COVID-19 when Sunday Masses are not occurring, you are invited to gather as a family for communal prayer each Sunday based on the Liturgy of the Word for that day.

Resources

In response to the closure of churches and suspension of Masses, resources have become abundant, particularly online, coming from all corners of the globe.

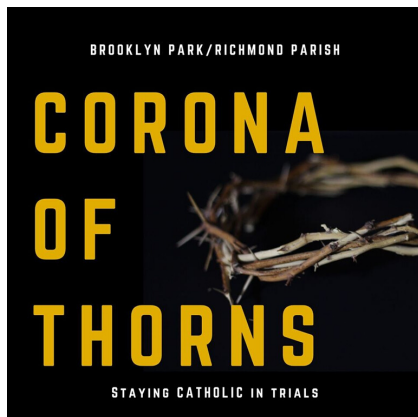
A full and comprehensive list of online resources has been developed and can be accessed via the Archdiocesan Website at www.adelaide.catholic.org.au in the COVID-19 section.

Here you will find resources for families, youth, parishes and individuals in each of the categories in this booklet that have been specially developed and curated for you.

You might also like to get in touch with your local parish for resources and support.

Other resources include:

- CRIS – Contact the Catholic Resource and Information Service of the Archdiocese of Adelaide to check out books and periodicals.
- Southern Cross Newspaper
- Podcasts



Prayer of Entrustment of Australia to Immaculate Mary, Our Lady Help of Christians

O Immaculate Mary, Help of Christians, Queen of Heaven and Earth,
and tender Mother of humanity,
at this time when a pandemic threatens all of your children,
we entrust to you our nation, Australia, and all who live in this country.

We commit to your intercession all the members of our community,
beginning with the weakest ones, from unborn to the sick, the disabled
and the elderly.

We commit to you our families, our young and old,
and all who are vulnerable, those who are quarantined or anxious.

We entrust to your Immaculate Heart those who have lost their livelihood
or employment, our pastors and other essential service workers, and our
leaders at this time.

We implore your intercession especially for the protection of nurses and
doctors and those who minister to the contagious sick in this crisis.

Reign over us Mother of God and teach us how to make the
Heart of Jesus reign in triumph in us
and around us, as it has reigned and triumphed in you!

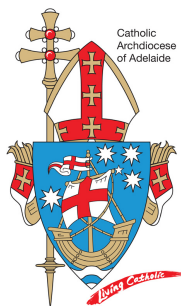
Amen.

This prayer was approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

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