

***Pastoral Statement to clergy of Killaloe diocese - Bishop
Fintan Monahan – March 24th, 2020***

As we continue to make every effort to mitigate and limit the effects of the COVID 19, Corona virus, I would like to pay tribute to all of you for the generous and committed responses you have given to the calls of the health authorities. Since further restrictions are placed upon us today, I pray in a special way, that you may have the gift of perseverance. I thank all those involved in healthcare whose tireless and dedicated service have ensured that our health and wellbeing are prioritised along with all those who continue to ensure that our essential needs are met. May God bless you all in your work.

I also thank you, the priests of the Diocese for your efforts in ensuring that as many people as possible have access to liturgical services and pastoral care. I know that the sense of spiritual accompaniment has given great reassurance to people who may be frightened or anxious. Much of this has been done with the help of internet technology and it is appreciated by many.

Along with my brother Bishops and following consultation with healthcare professionals, we are issuing these regulations with regard to pastoral care during this period. It is our hope that these practices will ensure the continued safety and protection of all our people.

Guidelines to do with Ministry of Baptism, Ministry to the sick, those who are seriously ill and people seeking the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Baptism

Following on from today's Government announcement limiting social gatherings to a maximum of four people - Except in the case of danger of death Baptisms should be postponed until further notice.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

- The normal schedule of Confessions in churches has ceased for the time being.
- If a priest is approached by an individual seeking the sacrament of Reconciliation, all the recommendations regarding hygiene, no hand-shake, social distance etc. apply. Priests should hear the Confession in a large space with the penitent at a distance of two metres. It is recommended that priest and penitent should remain standing, if possible, as a way to keep the confession short and to minimize contact with hard surfaces.

Forgiveness of Sins and Easter Duty

- Catholic doctrine teaches that if a person cannot get to Confession, it is sufficient to confess one's sins to God, seeking forgiveness and with the intention of going when next possible to Confession. God forgives the sins and the person is renewed in heart and soul. When the opportunity then arises later to go to Confession, he or she should do so.
- At his morning Mass on March 20th, Pope Francis' spoke about this doctrine in words that can also help resolve any issue about fulfilling our Easter duty:

"I know that many of you go to confession before Easter... Many will say to me: 'But Father...I can't leave the house and I want to make my peace with the Lord. I want Him to embrace me... How can I do that unless I find a priest?'. Do what the catechism says. It's very clear. If you don't find a priest to go to confession, speak to God. He's your Father. Tell Him the truth: 'Lord. I did this and this and this. Pardon me.' Ask His forgiveness with all your heart with an act of contrition, and promise Him, 'afterward I will go to confession.' You will return to God's grace immediately. You yourself can draw near, as the

catechism teaches us, to God's forgiveness, without having a priest at hand.”

Pastoral Care of the Elderly and the Sick (First Friday Calls)

- On the basis of the public health guidelines, First Friday house visits and other pastoral house visits should cease except in the cases of the anointing of those who are seriously or gravely ill (see below).
- Pastoral visits can be replaced for the time being with other forms of pastoral outreach such as telephone conversations with prayers and blessings. Priests can invite the elderly and sick to accept with a spirit of Christian sacrifice, this loss of a regular visit so often accompanied by the sacrament of Reconciliation and the reception of Holy Communion.

The Anointing of Those who are Dying

- Considering the risks and dangers at this present time, it is not expected that priests in parishes will be called upon to anoint someone with Covid-19 in their homes. It is foreseen that anyone seriously ill with Covid-19 will be transferred to hospital. The hospital chaplains will follow hospital protocols in anointing such patients.
- If it should happen in the future that it appears priests might be called to anoint a person with Covid-19, advice should be sought from the HSE and the advice and guidance of hospital chaplains.
- With regard to celebrating the sacrament of the sick for the dying (last rites) in cases that are not Covid-19, it is essential that in anointing the sick, the priest should use a cotton bud or surgical glove for the anointing with Holy Oil and dispose of them appropriately. The rite should be administered while at a distance of 1 metre. It is important to follow

recommendations on hand hygiene after the celebration of the Sacrament.

- In entering the house of the person to be anointed, the priest should avoid contact with others in the house. It should be borne in mind that a priest (as would be the case for anyone) entering another house involves the risk of spreading the virus either through the priest himself (perhaps unknowingly a bearer of the virus) or through the priest contracting the virus from others in the house, including the dying person, all of whom again perhaps, unknowingly, have the virus.
- It is clear that some priests will themselves, because of their health condition or age, feel unable to attend to the sick person in their local parish. They may need to call on another priest from elsewhere to celebrate the sacrament.