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Pastoral letter to the people of Parramatta on the coronavirus and Holy Week 2021

My dear brothers and sisters,

As we prepare to celebrate the Paschal Mystery and the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, I write to update you on the situation regarding COVID restrictions affecting our parishes and faith communities during Holy Week.

As we are a community of faith, and despite the restrictions on attending Mass, I encourage you, where possible, to attend your local Mass and as much as possible, celebrate the Easter season.

With sensible precautions that are increasingly being scaled back, we can once again come together as a faith community. Fortunately for the people of New South Wales, we can practice our faith with greater freedom than most of the country and indeed the world. This has been due to taking sensible and responsible steps to mitigate the risks associated with COVID.

As the Government restrictions change, the Diocese of Parramatta will endeavour to notify you of these changes and how they affect your faith communities. We continue working with NSW Health and government agencies to best manage the affects of COVID on our communities.

My 20 March 2020 decree (in accordance with Canons 85 and 87) that Catholics are dispensed from their Sunday Mass obligations (Canon 1247) will remain in place. I will await the advice of health experts before rescinding this degree.

Masses and religious gatherings will, for now and until we receive updated advice from health authorities, remain capped only by the 2 square metre rule. Parishes need the COVID-19 Safety Plan in place to manage all Masses and parish events. Parishes may also be subject to spot audits by public health officials to ensure compliance with the COVID-19 Safety Plan.

Restrictions on singing during Masses have eased slightly. Singing remains a critical part of our liturgical celebrations. Congregational singing can occur and is indeed encouraged. Where possible, liturgies should feature singing and a musical component.

Outdoor Masses are still subject to the 2 square metre rule. Congregational singing can be held indoors, if the Parish chooses, and is instead subject to the 4 square metre rather than 2 square metre rule. Masks will be mandatory in this instance. Up to 30 singers/performers will be permitted to sing indoors. The instructions received are that the choir should be facing forward, 1.5 metres apart and located at least 5 metres from the congregation. There is currently no maximum cap for outdoor singing by the choir. However, the same distancing rules apply to outdoor singing as indoor singing.

Parish events, like morning teas, can be held. The same restrictions apply, and buffet food distribution should be avoided. Masks and gloves are mandatory for those preparing food.

Though the annual Catholic Youth Parramatta Palm Sunday procession in Parramatta has been cancelled, Palm Sunday should be celebrated in your local parishes.

On Maundy Thursday, the washing of the feet is optional. You may decide to halve the number of people. Precautions should be taken like using fresh towels between each person.

The veneration of the cross on Good Friday can be done by bowing to the cross. Only the priest is to kiss the cross. For now, parishioners are not able to touch the cross.

Some parishes and chaplaincies have also requested permission to duplicate some of the Holy Week ceremonies to accommodate greater attendance. It is my view that such a decision be taken at the local level, but it might also be necessary to implement some booking system to balance out numbers.

In the event that restrictions are eased on faith communities before Holy Week you will be advised accordingly from the Chancery.

I thank you for your love and commitment to each other and our Church. May you all have a holy and blessed Easter.

Yours in Christ the Redeemer,



**Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv
Bishop of Parramatta**

*Given at Parramatta on 19 March 2021
Solemnity of St Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary*