We proclaim a crucified Christ
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16 September 2020

To the People and Clergy of the Archdiocese of Melbourne

Dear friends in Christ,

As we now welcome the beginnings of easing in COVID-19 Restrictions in Victoria, I would like to take this opportunity to write to you, the Clergy and people of our Archdiocese. It is great news that regional Victoria will, from tonight, move into the Third Step of the Roadmap to reopening, which includes our parishes located outside the metropolitan zone. However, we have a long way to go.

The deprivation in sacramental life has been a profound loss for our people. As well as all the other sufferings of the Pandemic, the sense of estrangement from the Eucharist has been a particular struggle for Catholics. The Mass is our primary means of gathering together in faith; it is the source and summit of our Christian life, and its life-giving nourishment and healing is dearly missed.

In the midst of this loss, I am grateful to our Priests and Deacons for continuing to serve the faithful, for sharing a sacramental ministry even under strict conditions, and for being alongside our people and their loved ones in times of death and grief. Thank you for your faithfulness.

All of us are anxious to open church doors, but I want to emphasise our need to be creative in the ways we do so, especially with the thousands of children who have been waiting for Sacraments of Initiation. Countless Catholic families are awaiting Baptism, Reconciliation, Holy Communion and Confirmation for their children. Adults, too, have longed to be received into the life of the Church. We shall be exploring possibilities such as outdoor liturgies in parish and school settings to facilitate these crucial events of grace and welcome.

Throughout the pandemic, I have been advocating directly with the Government, reminding authorities continually of our respectful compliance with each stage of restrictions, and seeking a fair consideration in what is permitted. The Catholic community throughout the pandemic has

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been constructive and positive. We have, and continue to act in a mature way, caring for the safety and vulnerability of Victorians facing great risk. Thankfully the signs of driving down COVID numbers are looking good at this moment and Catholics join other people of faith in giving thanks for this outcome and working to ensure the steps ahead do not take us backward.

Now, it is essential that the Government does not treat faith communities as an afterthought to the opening up of other sectors. Our churches are locations for communities of care and essential service, and must be treated fairly and reasonably.

Practically speaking, I have been in discussion with the Premier to thank him for overturning the restriction on spiritual ministry to the sick and the dying, and have assured him that the Catholic Church is able to manage restrictions (including good hygiene, face coverings, social distancing and density requirements). If pubs and restaurants can open, then places of worship should be open under similar conditions and numbers.

If case numbers track well, I expect we will see larger outdoor gatherings in regional Victoria become possible over the next few weeks, and proportionate opportunities for gathering in metropolitan Melbourne. I am hopeful that this may occur sometime in October, which would be a deeply welcomed improvement on the current Roadmap indications. If we can open our churches, even for outdoor gatherings, then we should open them.

The Deputy Premier and the Multicultural Affairs Minister are conducting discussions this month through the Multifaith Leaders Forum. The Archdiocese will be contributing to these meetings. In addition I will continue to engage with the Premier and Ministers directly on the Church's need for opening doors, carefully and safely.

Be assured of my ongoing closeness in prayer and concern. I have heard your cry, and I am working to bring your voice to the authorities. The Lord has promised he will be with us always; let us place our hope in Him.

With every grace and blessing, I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus,



Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Archbishop of Melbourne

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