

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE: A LETTER FROM FATHER STEVE 20/03/20

The Parish of Sacred Heart – Diamond Creek

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Dear Parishioners,

As you might expect, our parish leadership has had to make some decisions in relation to the care of our parish community in these extraordinary times. A significant impact upon us all is that as of 7.30 pm Wednesday the 18th of March, the Bishops of the Province of Victoria have called for the immediate suspension of public liturgies, celebrations of the Mass and all other gatherings in our various dioceses, until further notice. This includes all the planned Sacramental Celebrations for the children in our parishes, such as First Eucharist, Confirmation and First Reconciliation. Weddings and baptisms that have already been scheduled will be celebrated, but only with immediate family members present, and funerals may proceed, but with the restriction of immediate family. We recognise, feel and acknowledge the distress and concern this will bring for many of us. Given the extent of this situation, our pastoral and legal responsibilities, our parish response will be pastoral and measured, but it will also need to be sustainable and so we outline here what we have thought about so far and we ask for your assistance.

Reaching out – It is consistent with our mission as Christians to reach out to others in need. This situation offers us the opportunity to be considerate and sensitive to the needs of others, especially those most vulnerable in our parish and neighbourhood. Let us be people who each take the responsibility to bring hope, compassion and support to the world around us. If you, or someone you know, needs more support that you can provide, for example, struggling to access the shops for essential groceries or other goods, please contact the parish office for assistance. We will endeavour to assist. However in that regard we will need volunteers to help. If you would like to be of such support please contact the parish office.

Sunday obligation – In light of the bishop’s decision to suspend all liturgies, all Catholics in Victoria are dispensed from their Sunday obligation until further notice (canon 1248).

We will endeavour to find local ways to work with this situation and how to stream Mass locally. You can also stream Mass live from the Archdiocese at 1.00 weekdays and 11.00 on Sundays - <https://melbournecatholic.org.au/Mass>

Pastoral responses so far –

Our church will be open during the day, during the hours Pat Guatta is in the office, for private prayer, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament will be available as an additional focus at this time.

We would like to be in contact with you and keep you updated. We ask that you provide your email address and telephone number to the parish office. We intend setting up email groups so that we can keep parishioners informed of parish responses to COVID-19, keep you abreast of any other news or items of interest. You might send an email to diamondcreek@cam.org.au to inform the parish office of your wish to receive updating emails.

We encourage you to follow the St. Mary’s parish website <http://www.cam.org.au/greensborough> for updates. This also has postings of my homilies and will have updates, articles of interest and further spiritual nourishment.

Our priests and pastoral associate will be available for pastoral support as usual. We may need to find new ways of being in contact if face to face contact is not possible.

You might be interested to read an article on the Australian Psychological Society website on Tips for Coping with Coronavirus Anxiety https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/38073179-4701-48bd-afd9-988c560ee2f9/20APS-IS-COVID-19-P1.pdf. You might consider sharing this article with others.

Parish finances - We will inform you of any further directives in response to the Virus. We do however ask that you continue to financially support the parish because we continue to have financial expenses that we are required to meet, and your support is essential to ensure that we are able to pay wages of parish staff, utilities, loan repayments and maintenance, as well as the stipends of the priests. If you are looking for ways to do this and you don’t currently have a direct debit or credit card arrangement with the parish, please contact the parish office. You can leave your Thanksgiving Offering envelopes at the parish office during office hours, or deposit it in the mail slot just under Pat Guatta’s window at the parish office. You may even place in a separate, appropriately marked envelope (Support of priests) what you would intend to give in the first collection for the support of the priests of the parish.

Finally, we might look for the ways in which God will grace us for this time. Fear spreads as rapidly and maybe even faster that the virus. Be mindful of remaining present to the facts. This website of the Department of Health and Human Services provides updates from the Chief Health Officer. <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>.

These words of Eric Massinari of Spiritual Directors’ International, may encourage and remind us, in the current climate when fear and selfishness can be predominant:- “Social distance places no limit on the heart’s capacity to be compassionate.” Let us open our hearts to God’s compassionate and soothing presence so that we might be consolers in our families and our world.

Our partnered parishes Lenten theme is *Stand Up and Be Not Afraid.* Did you know that in the New Testament *“Be Not Afraid”* appears 365 times – once for every day of the year? We will continue to communicate with you during this time and we encourage you to keep in touch with us.

With every blessing,

*Frs. Steven Rigo, Lenin Thenamirtham, Tao Pham* and *Sr. Margaret Sapsford*