



Mary Immaculate Parish

Eagle Vale

24th May 2020

"And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time." (Matthew 28:20)

Dear Parishioners,

Further to his earlier directives, Bishop Brian Mascord has determined that, due to the easing of lockdown restrictions in NSW, churches in the Diocese of Wollongong may re-open for limited public celebrations of Mass from Sunday 31 May. The decision, however, is left to the discretion of a local Parish Priest and his Council.

As Parish Leadership Team, we have made the decision that our church will not open for public Masses during Stage One of the easing of lockdown restrictions. We realise, affirm, and share your strong desire to return to Mass and receive Holy Communion. The following are the reasons:

(1) Health is paramount - This lockdown is not something anyone wanted or foresaw, but came about because of the rapid spread of a deadly virus. We closed our church for the common good, to flatten the curve of infections and protect everybody, especially the most vulnerable, the elderly, and the immunocompromised. Covid-19 is still present in our community. In our early success with the virus, our weariness with lockdown, and our enthusiasm for re-opening, we do not want to rush back to "normal" and discover we hit a sudden second wave of infections. We need to protect our Parishioners, and also those who minister and serve them.

(2) Logistical challenges - This re-opening is not "back to normal", but is limited during Stage One to only ten worshippers. Those ten worshippers would need to pre-register (with their names and contact details recorded), be ushered, sanitise their hands upon entry, and be physically distanced during Mass. In addition, our church buildings, chairs and liturgical furniture would need to be

thoroughly cleaned before and after each Mass. To cater for these requirements and restrictions, our ministers, servers, and church cleaners would need to put in resources that, at this stage, are beyond our capacity to provide.

(3) The heart of our faith and our mission - The Eucharist is the source and summit of our Catholic Christian faith. It is the ultimate sign and instrument of God's presence among us. The Eucharist reveals to us the loving heart of God - a God who gives Himself entirely to us as food for the journey. God does not only give Himself to us during Mass. He gives Himself to us every moment of every day. God is "with us always," in the words of this Sunday's Gospel. By preparing our hearts, we can receive at any time the fullness of His mercy and grace, the Reality given to us in the Blessed Sacrament, because of his love for us. That's what "Spiritual Communion" is - when we open ourselves in prayer to receive what God is constantly desiring to give us. The Council of Trent reminds us that although we might physically receive a sacrament, for it to transform our lives, we need to be "well-disposed" - to hospitably welcome God into our hearts.

"And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time." Trusting in Jesus' words to us this Sunday, we have decided to focus our limited resources on maintaining a good-quality liturgical experience of prayer, worship, and Spiritual Communion to the hundreds who are joining us via Facebook.

This decision will be reconsidered by us once the NSW Government announces that our state is moving towards Stage Two of easing of lockdown restrictions.

Lastly, let us not forget that while our church building remains closed, the Church is still open! We remain a community of disciples united around Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master.

Fr Slawek, Parish Priest and Parish Leadership Team