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## **Pastoral letter to the clergy, religious and people of Parramatta during the coronavirus crisis**

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Many of us feel powerless in the face of this corona virus pandemic. We see in a devastating way how widely a virus spreads person to person and the immense damage it is doing to our community.

We are indeed living in a time of great crisis locally and globally. So, it is only human that we will experience considerable fear and anxiety.

However, as people of faith in Jesus of Nazareth, we are called to place our trust in our God who promises to be present with us even in these times of great suffering and sickness.

Even in his seeming absence, we still place our hope in the One who loves us tenderly and with great mercy. And so, as responsible citizens and faithful Catholics, in solidarity with our wonderful doctors and health professionals, our first rule must be: **"Do no harm."**

That means not doing anything that might spread the virus to others with whom we live in community. We need to listen to our medical experts and not to conspiracy theorists who use any crisis to profiteer or stir up hatred and division.

We must also comply with the directives of our government authorities for the sake of the common good. The gospel calls us to practice such solidarity in these difficult days.

As many of you already know I have [issued a statement](#) which involves the closure of churches and the curtailment of our regular worship practices until this crisis abates.

Please adhere strictly to these directives that I have given. Further updates can be found here: [www.parracatholic.org/covid19](http://www.parracatholic.org/covid19) as the situation we are in is so fast changing and complex.

All of us in the Diocese of Parramatta must follow these guidelines without exception, so that we can be like St Joseph: 'Protectors of Life'.



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Becoming 'Protectors of Life' will certainly demand of us sacrifices. Let's especially not forget the suffering in our midst: the elderly, the weak, the disabled, the homeless, the unemployed et cetera. Let us not forget vulnerable groups and communities: the indigenous, the asylum seekers in detention, prisoners et cetera.

Then there are also those whom the Catholic Church through the traditional Lenten Project Compassion supports.

In previous ages before germs and viruses were understood, people blamed strangers, Jews and 'outsider's' for sickness. Anyone who was different could be the target of people's fear.

So, let us in these days be especially mindful of caring with compassion and charity for any persons in community who are on the 'margins': be they the aged, the chronically ill and all those living in poverty and isolation. Let our love for them be real and concrete.

May we also use these days to deepen our prayer and spiritual lives. Even as we mourn our losses, Pope Francis encourages us, "Let us call upon him today, firmly rooted in prayer, for without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 259)

So please visit our diocesan website at: [www.parracatholic.org/covid19](http://www.parracatholic.org/covid19) for some good and helpful information about how we can follow this path of deeper prayer. It includes online liturgy resources for personal and family prayer and various options for viewing Mass on-line and meditating on the daily scripture readings.

The coronavirus crisis strikes fear and anxiety into people across the globe. It also reveals deep cultural prejudices and divisions against the elderly, the weak and even those of certain race and ethnicity.

Our faith makes us step beyond these human boundaries. It expands our horizons and pushes the limits of our capacity to love.

Through the example of Jesus, we are called to embrace those vulnerable in our society and reach out to them. It is not the time to look after ourselves only but to care for others, through our prayers, acts of kindness and deep communion with them.

May these days of suffering and fear draw us ever close to Christ and let's all pray with Pope Francis to Mary, our mother:



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### **Pope Francis' Prayer to Mary during the coronavirus pandemic**

O Mary,  
you always shine on our path  
as a sign of salvation and of hope.  
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,  
who at the cross took part in Jesus' pain, keeping your faith firm.  
You, Salvation of all People,  
know what we need,  
and we are sure you will provide  
so that, as in Cana of Galilee,  
we may return to joy and to feasting  
after this time of trial.  
Help us, Mother of Divine Love,  
to conform to the will of the Father  
and to do as we are told by Jesus,  
who has taken upon himself our sufferings  
and carried our sorrows  
to lead us, through the cross,  
to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.

Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God. Do not disdain the entreaties of  
we who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

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*Given at Parramatta on 25 March 2020  
The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord*