NOTES TO ACCOMPANY EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE GUIDELINES MARCH 2020
Archbishop Eamon Martin

Dear brothers and sisters,

During these difficult times I ask "let us pray for one another." As St Patrick's Day approaches let us pray his breastplate prayer and also turn to the Rosary and our other traditional family prayers that kept the faith alive in Ireland during centuries of persecution and turmoil. We are blessed to have social media resources in many parishes – let us use these to the full to keep our family of families together in prayer and reflection. Please share your webcam links etc. with each other so that as many people as possible can continue to be nourished by the power of God's Word and Sacrament during these uncertain days.

It is important to remind ourselves why we are introducing these restrictions. They are motivated by a sense of care for the common good and especially for those most vulnerable. We aim to minimise the movement of vulnerable people, including many of our faithful and most devoted parishioners – and our clergy! This is to protect them from the worst of this virus and to minimise the number of serious illnesses and fatalities. At the same time we want to reach out in Christian compassion and generosity of spirit to as many parishioners as possible through prayer and pastoral action. Each Christian community should be acutely aware of the responsibility to care for those who are most at risk. For example, even where it may not be appropriate to visit the elderly, a simple telephone call to enquire about their needs could mean so much to them.

Should public Masses go ahead?

In the current emergency situation, all are dispensed from the obligation to physically attend Sunday Mass.

I am advising that you inform your parishioners as soon as possible that the public celebration of Mass is suspended.

Please maximise the number of opportunities for participation in Mass via radio or webcam or other social media and let your people know via the website and facebook etc. how to access this. We will try to compile a list for the diocesan website in the coming days.

The idea of having small Masses of up to 100 people is intended to be an EXCEPTION rather than a rule and is mainly to facilitate the holding of funeral services or weddings for immediate family members and close relatives only.

I encourage all priests to continue to say their daily Mass privately and to remember the needs of their people. Try to encourage as many of your parishioners and others as possible to join in this via social media etc. We should all pray earnestly for one another and for those who are contracting the virus and for those who are caring for them at home or in hospital.

Funerals, Weddings and Baptisms

Please ask your local funeral directors to help you get the message across to families that no more than one hundred people should gather at any one time. These situations will have to be handled very sensitively and in a pastoral manner – remind everyone that this is for the safety of all concerned, especially the vulnerable. In any gatherings please also encourage safe spacing of a metre in accordance with public health authority advice and also to refrain from shaking hands or other physical contact as a means of expressing sympathy.

The same applies to baptisms and weddings – no more than one hundred close relatives or guests in the Church. Additionally at baptisms the blessing of water should be done without touching, the

anointings should be with separate cotton buds and a single jug of water should be blessed and used for the pouring.

Pastoral Care of the Sick and Anointing

This is especially a time for praying for and caring for our sick and being conscious of the many health workers and carers who are selflessly looking after them in trying circumstances. Our priests and other pastoral workers must always follow the instructions of health authorities or those in charge of hospital wards or nursing homes re visiting etc. Cotton buds and/or sterile gloves must be used for anointing. In so far as possible, for the safety of the patient and the carer, all care must be without direct physical contact. All visits should be for a maximum of five minutes.

Other Gatherings

All Confirmations are postponed until further notice. Please reassure the children and their families that we will make new arrangements as soon as it is safe to do so.

First Confessions, Communions, etc. should also be suspended until further notice.

All non-essential pastoral gatherings and meetings, such as formation gatherings, retreats and seminars are cancelled. The rule of thumb is: if it is not necessary, postpone or cancel.

This is an occasion for all of us – especially in families – to pray more intensely for each other and especially for those who have succumbed to the illness. We should pray also for those at the frontlines – especially doctors, nurses and medical staff and other carers, including clergy – that the Lord will protect them as they place their own wellbeing at risk in the service of all.

Spiritual Communion in Your Heart

People can be reminded of the Catholic tradition of a spiritual communion in one's heart.

When we cannot attend Mass, we can still make an Act of Spiritual Communion, in which we express our faith in Christ and in His Presence in the Eucharist, and ask Him to unite Himself with us. The basic elements of an Act of Spiritual Communion are an Act of Faith; an Act of Love; a desire to receive Christ; and an invitation to Him to come into your heart. There are various popular prayers to accompany an Act of Spiritual Communion, eg:

My Jesus,
I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace you as if you were already there and unite myself wholly to you.
Never permit me to be separated from you.
Amen.

This can also be an occasion to remind people of how to receive appropriately in the hand. cf *The Mystagogical Catecheses of Cyril of Jerusalem* 350 AD *"... Approaching, therefore, come not with your wrists extended, or the fingers open; but make your left hand as if a throne for your right, which is on the eve of receiving the King. And having hollowed your palm, receive the Body of Christ, saying after it, Amen."*

Extract from Saint Patrick's Breastplate
Christ with me,

Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

Memorare
Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection,
implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided.
Inspired with this confidence,
I fly to you, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.
To you I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not my petitions, but in your mercy, hear and answer. Amen.