ARCHDIOCESE OF ARMAGH

Ara Coeli, Cathedral Road
Armagh, BT61 7QY

Tel: + 44 (0) 28 3752 2045
Fax: +44 (0) 28 3752 6182
E-mail: admin@aracoeli.com
www.archdioceseofarmagh.com

26 May 2020

To: Clergy, Religious and Parishioners in the Archdiocese of Armagh

Dear Father, Dear Deacon, Dear sisters and brothers,

This weekend we celebrate Pentecost – the great feast of the Holy Spirit and the "birthday" of the Christian Church. I find it sad and disappointing that we have now come the whole way through the Easter season and we are still unable to gather physically for Mass and the sacraments.

We have all been making great sacrifices to protect health and life and to support the Common Good. But we miss meeting up as a parish community. Thankfully our sacrifices are bearing fruit and the number of deaths and ICU admissions from Covid19 is continuing to decline.

I want to thank you for the work you are doing at local level to plan for the full "re-opening" of parish life and worship. Please work closely with your priests so that your parish stands ready to respond quickly when the public health authorities tell us it is safe to begin gathering together again for Mass inside our churches.

Thanks also for your response to my call for ideas and questions to help draft a National Framework Document to maximise consistency across the dioceses and parishes of Ireland. At the Standing Committee of the Bishops' Conference yesterday (meeting for the first time over video call) the Bishops agreed to refine this framework further to include a helpful checklist for parish priests and Covid-19 Parish Support Teams on physical distancing and hygiene. This will help you evaluate progress made to date and guide any necessary improvements in practice within your parish.

The Framework Document will also offer guidance on a number of important liturgical issues which many of you have been enquiring about e.g. the distribution and reception of Holy Communion; advice for concelebrants, deacons, altar servers; best practice for extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist and others who assist at Mass. At the forthcoming Episcopal Conference meeting in early June the Bishops will consider extending the current suspension of the Sunday obligation, the Sign of Peace and use of Holy Water fonts. We will also discuss the celebration of Baptism, Marriage and the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the context of any ongoing restrictions.

It is hoped that the National Framework Document will help guide our ongoing preparations at parish and diocesan level. It will also support our continuing engagement with government and public health authorities – north and south – in making a case for the early resumption of the public celebration of Mass and the Sacraments in a measured and safe way.

God bless you and your families this Pentecost weekend. Please Stay safe. And pray safe!

Yours sincerely,

+ Eamon Martin

Eamon Martin
Archbishop of Armagh