



**Pastoral Letter from Bishop Noel Treanor regarding
measures taken in response to COVID-19
25 March 2020**

My dear people and dear friends, today I wish to address a word to you all -the people, priests, deacons, religious and monks who live in our Diocese of Down and Connor.

As you know only too well, we and the entire human family are confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic. It has already taken the lives of some of our neighbours. With you, I extend my sympathies to the families of those who have died due to the virus. We assure them of our prayers. Sadly, it is thought by clinicians that this virus will end the earthly lives of others in our community in the coming days and weeks.

Over the past week and more, following on the advice and guidance of government and our public authorities, and having consulted with fellow clergy and others, I have issued guidance and directives to be implemented in our parishes.

These directives have, of course, limited the work and outreach of the pastoral work and services of the diocese, its offices and agencies. Regrettably, we decided to close our Churches first for the celebration of Mass with congregations. This morning we closed them completely until further notice.

The sole aim of these measures is to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, to save lives and to enable us all to protect each other. They were put in place to protect and save our lives – the lives of all of us, the elderly, youth, priests and people.

These measures were issued after much thought and prayer and indeed with a very heavy heart. I realise they upset some. Some find them hard to accept. I have received some pleas to re-open Churches. I know the pain of these measures. But we must all stop and take clear stock of the threat to life of this “invisible virus that transmits easily and kills” and of which you and I can be carriers without knowing it.

Today, I wish to let you know of a further decision that I have taken after much thought and prayer. This decision concerns the funerals of our dead, of our beloved deceased.

As of today, our sisters and brothers in Christ, who die will be taken directly to the cemetery for burial. In the cemetery, a short funeral prayer service will take place, respecting the determinations of the public authorities in regard to inter-personal social distancing and any other provisions deemed necessary.

Requiem Mass will be celebrated in memory of the deceased person at a later date, when this pandemic has passed and when the conditions permitting gatherings of people in buildings and in Churches prevail.

It is, however, necessary to recognise that if arrangements have been made at this point and time for funerals, those arrangements will be honoured and carried through.

It is simply too risk-laden to gather inside buildings even in small numbers. We must proactively exercise extreme care for each other and for ourselves. To do otherwise would be unchristian.

I realise the pain this will cause to many, to many families, to many individuals. I ask for your forbearance, for your charity and for your care for others. And as I do so, on behalf of all of us, I wish to salute the heroism of all who work in our hospitals, nursing homes, in health care services, in the administration of our health care systems and in the National Health Service.

I thank all who support the Nursing and Medical teams in the front line, the Ambulance and Paramedical teams and the chaplains, and all who work from laundry to laboratory in and around our hospitals. We salute their heroism, their courage and their dedication.

May God protect us all and may the Risen Christ sustain hope in our hearts and minds as we face together the circumstances that will test our courage and bring out the heroic best in so many already exemplified by the initiative taken by so many in our neighbourhoods to support those who are housebound and lonely, those who need help and to provide foodbanks for the service of many.

Thank you.

+ Noël Treanor
Bishop of Down and Connor