

Dear Bishops, Priests and Deacons,

As you know, the NSW Premier has now recommended that people wear masks when they are in crowded places and social distancing is not easy to maintain. She cites as examples public transport and places of worship. I know that parishes are attempting to get people to keep their distance within the church building, but because people remain together there for 40 or more minutes, it would seem that masks will provide an additional safeguard. The primary precautions remain hand sanitising and distance, distance, distance...

Please inform your parishioners that the government has recommended masks when they are present at religious services. It should not normally be necessary (or appropriate) for the celebrant(s) to wear masks, apart from when distributing Holy Communion. (In many parts of the world, Communion is distributed silently as an added safeguard – but you may find a mask is helpful at that point in the liturgy). Note that for the remainder of the liturgy, all ministers on the sanctuary must remain well apart – a few metres at least; do not have a server hold the missal for you, please use a stand. Likewise, if you have a cantor or very small *schola* group, they must stand several metres apart, and at least 3 metres from other people. Singing is a high risk activity!

We have now had another case in a parish of a parishioner testing positive. The parish team has responded admirably to this challenge – including the late cancellation of masses on Saturday afternoon. Health Department advice at this stage is that the matter is low risk, but there is likely to be media coverage tonight. With so much concern in the community, it is vital that we keep our churches safe and open for worship, and that our people know their church is safe.

Tomorrow's Zoom meeting with the Archbishop will focus on the ways we are dealing with the COVID challenges. Please join the meeting at 2pm and bring your questions and experiences to share for the benefit of all.

Yours fraternally,

*Gerry*

Very Rev Dr Gerald Gleeson,

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