

## **Statement by the Northern Catholic Bishops**

**Re: extension of the Covid-19 Shut-down by the Northern Ireland Executive**

**to 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021.**

The Northern Ireland Executive took the unanimous decision to extend the current Covid-19 restrictions until Friday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021. This decision was based on the strong recommendation of the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Advisor, as a result of the continued extremely high level of transmission of the Covid-19 virus throughout the community (which over these last four weeks had not reduced to the level that had been hoped for), along with the increasing numbers in hospital and intensive care.

In the light of this decision, and on the basis of the clear and unequivocal public health advice that people should continue to *stay at home*, the Northern Catholic Bishops have decided that, until 5 March (but subject to ongoing review in line with any change to the public health advice), the celebration of the Eucharist and other liturgies should continue to take place without the physical presence of the faithful. Marriage, funeral, baptismal liturgies and drive-in services may continue (subject to strict safety guidelines and regulations). Arrangements for recording and/or livestreaming and making individual visits for private prayer are also permissible in accordance with regulations. We encourage parishes, where possible, to continue to broadcast the celebration of Mass - and other devotions and prayer services - online and on other media, knowing that faith and prayer can be a tremendous support to individuals and society during these difficult times.

We once more make this decision reluctantly, conscious of the pain that not being able to gather for public worship causes for all the faithful, but in the hope that this period of sacrifice is inspired by the

command of Jesus to love our neighbours and undertaken for the protection of life and health and for the Common Good.

We continue to ask for prayers for the sick, the bereaved and all those whose livelihoods have been particularly impacted by the pandemic. We keep especially in mind all health workers, carers, chaplains and other essential workers. We welcome the announcement that a similar position is being taken by the leaders of the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland and many other denominations and faith communities in response to the unequivocal message from public health authorities that as many people as possible stay at home at this time.