

**Richard**



**Bishop of Arundel & Brighton**

**PASTORAL MESSAGE**

**24<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Following the Government announcement yesterday, mandating the closure of places of worship, I have informed all our parish priests that, with immediate effect, all churches, halls and associated facilities must be closed until further notice.

This requirement has been made with a heavy heart, for I am very conscious of the importance of our churches for all of us. They are places where we celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Sacraments and hear the Word of God proclaimed and explained. They are places of prayer, reflection, rest and peace. They are places where we gather as communities, offering a welcome to so many.

This closure comes at a very difficult time for us all, but it is vital that we work with everyone else in society to do everything we can to respond to the crisis caused by the Coronavirus, Covid-19. The more effective we are in observing the present restrictions, the more effective will be the response.

It goes without saying that it is very difficult for us not to be able to join in the celebration of the Eucharist. The fact that Masses are being celebrated day by day in all our churches – albeit behind locked doors – will, I know, be a comfort to us all. The Mass reaches beyond those closed doors, for the whole world, together with the angels and saints, is present whenever the Eucharist is celebrated.

Join in these celebrations through live-streaming whenever you can. The churches providing this service are listed on the Diocesan Website and information is also available on e-news. If you are not signed up to our Diocesan e-news, please do so now.

I cannot encourage you strongly enough to continue your lives of prayer and your reflection on the Scriptures. Pray the Rosary and, in this Season of Lent, reflect on the Stations of the Cross. There are many resources available on-line.

Many of you will have taken part in the Nation-wide moment of prayer on Saturday-last. I call on you all to join in this practice each week; the lighted candles in your windows offering a beacon of hope to others.

Know, too, that the Lord is with us on this difficult stage of our journey. He never leaves us and – perhaps as never before – we are called upon to follow Him, persevering in faith, hope and love for the good of all.

May Mary, the Mother of Christ and our Mother too, intercede for us.

Be assured of my own prayers for you all, especially those who are affected personally by the Coronavirus and all working in healthcare in our hospitals and communities.

With every Blessing,

+Richard