



Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC*HS Bishop of Motherwell

2nd March 2020

Dear Rev Fathers, Rev Deacons, Sisters and Others,

As the possibility of the coronavirus affecting us in Scotland appears to be growing, I think it is prudent to make comment on it and to take some precautionary measures in our churches.

First it is necessary to pray - both for those already suffering because of this virus, and then to pray for God's help that we may be protected from all harm. It is certainly an intention that we should pray fervently about this Lent.

Having heard of the consequences of an outbreak of the virus in other countries, particularly in the restriction of movement and the closure of public buildings, we can foresee that restrictions will be put in place in Scotland also and I would expect that gatherings in churches will be limited. We must hope and pray that our daily lives will not be restricted because this new disease has come among us. As we are aware of the danger of disruption to our lives as well as the health risks, it is prudent to take steps now to try to prevent the spread of the virus if it does come to Scotland.

The following are steps I am now putting in place in the churches across the Diocese of Motherwell with immediate effect:

- The Holy Water stoops for blessing ourselves are to be emptied. We can still bless ourselves as we enter the Church, but without using Holy Water;
- The Sign of Peace will be suspended for the time being;
- We will receive Holy Communion in the hand rather than on the tongue;
- The Lay Faithful will not receive the Precious Blood while the present crisis lasts.

All Ministers of the Eucharist, Ordinary and Extraordinary, must wash or sanitise their hands before distributing communion - at Mass and other Eucharistic Services, and at the homes of those they bring communion to. We all must comply with this and be seen to do it.

Only the Priest Celebrant or Assisting Deacon should purify the Sacred Vessels - paten, chalice and ciborium - used at Mass.

Sacristans, and others with responsibility in setting up for Mass, must wash their hands thoroughly before touching the Sacred Vessels and the hosts to be consecrated at Mass.

In general, therefore, I encourage everyone to take good care in regard to hygiene while participating in Church Services and other activities. It would be prudent also not to attend Mass if you are suffering from a cold or flu-like symptoms.

With my prayers and best wishes,

+ **Joseph Toal**

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