



23rd March 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I'm very sad to tell you what you have probably already gathered was going to happen: that in accordance with the latest Commonwealth and State restrictions, Archbishop Anthony Fisher has announced that all public Masses and other communal devotions, whether inside or outdoors, have been suspended from today until further notice.

The State government has clarified that this closure even includes private prayer in the church.

So our *church* will remain closed until further notice, **but this does not mean our *parish* has closed**. We are just going to have to do things very differently. We are going to get through this together, and we are going to come out the other end as a stronger community because we will have deepened in our trust in Jesus the Good Shepherd, and supported one another as true brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our plans will grow and develop. But this is what we have planned to date:

WORSHIP

Sunday Mass

Our plan is to live stream the 9am Sunday Mass each week. We strongly encourage you to join us live at 9am so that we can actually *gather* for Mass together (even if only virtually). Remember, you can also watch the recording at any time after that. To access the live stream click [here](#).

Mass is essentially a communal and public action (this is what the word "liturgy" means), and so it is very strange that we MGL priests will be celebrating Mass without you there. So we had this idea: **Please email us a photo of yourselves** to comms@stdeclansparish.org. We will print the photos and stick them to the pews in the church. This will mean that when Adam, Tony or I celebrate Mass we will see your faces smiling back at us. It will help us as we offer the Mass, and we hope it will help you to know that you are in our prayers and hearts as we celebrate the Eucharist.

Daily Mass

We are also planning to live stream weekday Masses at 9.15 am each day from Monday to Saturday. We will let you know when we are about to commence this.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

I am sorry we had to cancel the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation) tonight, but the closure of the church includes not being able to celebrate confessions inside. For the time being, all other times of Reconciliation are also cancelled (both Saturday mornings and Saturday evenings). I am exploring how we might be able to offer the Sacrament going forward in a way that is appropriate. We will let you know if we can determine a suitable plan.

Intercession Ministry

We have also launched a new ministry at this time: an intercession team. If you have a prayer request, you can send it to prayer@stdeclansparish.org. The intercession team will pray for your request.

If you would like to join the intercession team, please email Cathy Kennedy at evangelisation@stdeclansparish.org

OUR MISSION

Project Agape

We have launched another new ministry called *Project Agape* to assist people who are without support, are ill or need to self-isolate and so are unable to purchase groceries and/or medication. An explanation of how the project works can be found below:

If you or someone you know needs to self-isolate or is unable to visit the shops easily to get food and/or medication:

1. Contact the parish office on 9580 1310, or email Nellie at visitation@stdeclansparish.org and leave a message with your name and best contact number. Messages will be checked regularly.
2. Nellie will contact you, and a team member will bring groceries and/or medication to your home. Please remember that the team member will:
 1. call you on arrival
 2. leave the groceries and/or medication at the front door
 3. have no face-to-face contact
 4. follow up the visit with a phone call to check if you need any more help.
3. Payment for the groceries and/or medication can be discussed with Nellie. Please know that our primary concern is your health and wellbeing and we will support you in whatever way we can, including covering the cost of the groceries/medication, if you have a real need.

Alpha

We have had a great start to Alpha this year, but since it revolves around meeting and eating together in a group setting, we have had to be creative in how we support our guests without being able to meet onsite. Hosts, helpers and guests have been contacted and alternative options made available to continue the exciting faith journey that is Alpha. We ask that you keep all our Alpha participants in your prayers.

GROWING IN FAITH

Discipleship Groups

Our primary way for people to be formed in their faith is through attending Discipleship Groups, which normally meet in people's homes. During Lent they have been meeting in larger groups in Fernlands Hall and in the Meeting Room. We will start Discipleship groups online after Easter. So stay tuned.

If you were attending the Lenten Discipleship groups on the scriptural foundations of the Eucharist, you can keep watching them at home on FORMED (see details below). We suggest you watch one per week until Holy Week, as planned. Then after Easter, you can join an online Discipleship Group to watch episodes 6-10 of this series.

FORMED

St Declan's subscribes to an online Catholic audio-visual library called FORMED. Think of it as Netflix for Catholics. It has a range of great Catholic content for all ages and stages of faith development and is aimed at helping parishioners to understand, grow in and share the Catholic faith. It is available 24/7 and can be viewed via the internet or by the FORMED app.

For information on how to access FORMED, either go to the parish website <https://www.stdeclanspenshurst.org/> or access it via the parish app by clicking on 'Grow' under the 'More'

menu. Our St Declan's parish app has more information, recommendations and helpful hints about FORMED to help you get started.

We have more initiatives in the earlier stages of planning, so we will let you know of these as they are more fully developed.

PARISH FINANCIAL GIVING

70% of the parish's income currently comes from cash contributions (cash in the second collection and planned giving envelopes). In the current circumstances, this presents a huge challenge for our parish, as we are no longer able to gather at the church each Sunday for Eucharist.

Over 50% of our expenditure is spent on the wages of our lay staff, and in an attempt to keep serving our parishioners, I want to ensure the safety of their jobs through the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. But I need your help in the way you contribute financially to support the parish.

Please prayerfully consider an ongoing contribution online by credit card.

I know that some people's own financial circumstances are changing as a result of the pandemic too, and that this may affect their giving. I would not want anyone in those circumstances to feel pressured.

If you wish to switch to online giving, please click [here](#) (this takes you to St Declan's online giving platform, which is hosted by Tithe.ly).

You can also text the amount you want to give (e.g. \$50) to 0451266547 (your text message will take you to Tithe.ly to put your credit card details in).

The parish's online giving platform is used by 12,500 churches, and it possesses a PCI DSS Level 1 Secure rating + 256 bit SSL rating. It is the same level of encryption used by Amazon and many banks, and is the highest rating possible. It is safe, secure and easy.

IF YOU ARE SICK

Fr Adam, Fr Tony, and I want to reassure you that we will anoint, give communion, and pray with those who are seriously ill, including any who might contract COVID-19. If you are ill, please call the parish number (95801310) and follow the prompt (option 2) to the parish emergency line. We will do this while maintaining strict protocols to minimise the risk to ourselves so we can continue to minister to others.

FUNERALS

The government has allowed funerals as an exception to the closure of places of worship. They do, however, need to be restricted to immediate family only. We will still need to follow social distancing rules inside the church, appropriate hygiene and thorough cleaning of the church.

STAYING CONNECTED

Our priority at this time is to keep all parishioners connected and informed. Physical isolation should not mean that anyone is left without support and community around them. There are a number of ways we are doing this:

1. **Parish App:** The parish app is continually updated with new resources to help you not only keep informed at this time, but also grow in your faith with others. To download the app, click on the following link and follow the prompts: <http://bit.ly/stdeclansapp>
2. **Email:** If you have not done so already, please provide us with your email address to receive the latest information from the parish. Fill in this form: <http://bit.ly/stdeclansconnect>

3. **Parish Website:** Our website is being kept up-to-date with the latest information about the parish's ministry and service. Visit <https://www.stdeclanspenshurst.org/> for correspondence and resources, particularly if you are unable to access the parish app.

LAST WEEKEND

I was so moved and proud of our parish this past week. We managed to gather creatively under the circumstances, and there were so many offers from parishioners to serve the sick and elderly through Project Agape.

Thanks for all the great feedback we received about the Masses. Approximately 550 people attended Mass in the church or via live stream to Fernlands Hall over the five Masses.

418 people viewed the live stream. When you think that many "views" involved more than one person watching on the same device, that's a lot of people tuning in! There have been over 2000 views of the Masses since then. This gives me so much confidence as we move forward together.

My deepest thanks to all those people who helped make it happen: the liturgical ministers, the volunteers who guided people to the church and the hall, the communications and technical teams who made the live stream possible. I was so proud of every single team member who helped us pull off Mass on the weekend. You're amazing!

Be assured that Fr Adam, Fr Tony, the parish staff and I will be praying for you and your family. As I said at some of the Masses (but not all - sorry!): we will be offering Mass for the world, especially the sick, *but most especially for you, our St Declan's family*. We are your priests, we are so very proud of your response to this crisis already, and we love you.

Remember, no one should be faceless at this time, and we shall, by the grace of God, come out of this stronger together, and more deeply united in faith, hope, and love.

Yours in Christ,

Chris

Fr Chris Ryan MGL

Parish Priest