



7 May 2020

Churches can reopen in Alert Level Two

Dear brothers in Christ,

Greetings to you all in this time of what may be the last days of Lockdown Level Three. We continue to be inspired by the creative ways in which you have been providing pastoral and spiritual care of your parishioners. With the Prime Minister today announcing many details of what will be allowed under Level Two, we can at last look forward to our churches reopening and public Mass resuming. The date Level Two could begin is likely to be announced on Monday. We cannot assume today that it will begin as quickly as we all hope, but we can start to pray and prepare for it.

Level Two restrictions will allow churches to be open and Mass to be celebrated, but with no more than 100 people present. They will generally need to be seated a metre apart (families from the same “bubble” will likely be an exception). Records will be needed of each person attending, for possible future contact tracing. Strict hygiene measures will be needed. Weddings and funerals will be allowed in churches, again with a limit of 100 people present. You will be again able to visit parishioners in their homes to administer the Sacraments and for such other spiritual purposes as sought.

Your Bishops and the National Liturgy Office are giving urgent consideration as to how Holy Communion should be distributed. The provisions of our 13 March advice remain in place: they included no holy water in fonts; no physical contact during the sign of peace; and communion under one kind and only on the hand. We are looking at these and other issues urgently and with diligence, and we intend to provide substantial further guidance early next week.

Relevant parts of the Ministry of Health Alert Level Two restrictions and rules are attached for your immediate information.

Between now and early next week, we suggest that you consult with each other and your parish councils on how you might be able to meet the announced restrictions and hold Mass, looking at and considering how the Level Two rules apply to your individual churches. We believe that each parish will need its own approach to ensure continued safety for you and your parishioners.

Last month, as Pope Francis reflected on Jesus's Resurrection and the current crisis, he described how the time is ripe for "new imagination" allowing the "breath of the Spirit" to open new horizons. We know you will apply your wonderful dedication and creativity to how we operate under Alert Level Two, as you have during this crisis to date and do in all matters of your parish.

Yours sincerely in Christ

☒ **Patrick Dunn, Bishop of Auckland and NZCBC President**

☒ **John Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington, NZCBC Vice President**

☒ **Stephen Lowe, Bishop of Hamilton and NZCBC Secretary**

☒ **Paul Martin SM, Bishop of Christchurch**

☒ **Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin**

☒ **Michael Gielen, Auxiliary Bishop of Auckland**

Alert Level 2 rules relevant to Churches

The following information is from a Ministry of Health document published on 7 May 2020 and available in full at: <https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-system/alert-level-2/>

Gatherings and events

You can attend gatherings of no more than 100 people, like weddings, funerals, family events, concerts, religious services and public meetings, provided public health measures (see conditions below) can be maintained.

All gatherings outside of the home (indoors and outdoors) can have no more than 100 attendees, excluding staff like waiters. Indoor gatherings should be seated if possible, and should be approximately two hours long.

Food and drink consumption is fine at gatherings, so you can have food at wedding receptions or after a funeral or tangihanga. It should be prepared carefully and served individually, for example, not from a buffet.

Additional conditions on gatherings:

- Physical distancing and infection prevention and control requirements must be met.
- All gatherings should record attendees to ensure contact tracing can be conducted if necessary.
- Hospitality guidelines regarding alcohol consumption need to be strictly adhered to.
- You can't participate in any gatherings or events if you have COVID-19 symptoms or if you need to be in isolation/quarantine for any reason.

Public venues:

Many public venues, such as museums, food courts and markets, will be open again at Alert Level 2. However, there will be restrictions in place including the requirement to keep groups of attendees 1 metre apart. This might require limiting the number of people inside at once. Some venues may stay shut if they can't open safely.

At private homes:

You can have friends and family over to your home, but play it safe — keep surfaces clean, wash your hands, and keep the numbers low so you can practice safe distancing.