



## ARCHDIOCESE OF ARMAGH

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For parish websites and inclusion in bulletins:

### **Important message issued in the statement from the Irish Bishop's Conference**

Dear Father, Deacon, Brother, Sister,

#### **Do not lose heart – a message in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic**

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic the people of Ireland have endured testing times with courage, resilience, and compassion. Individuals and communities have made great sacrifices for the protection of life, health and the Common Good. Like many others, the Church has endeavoured to support the people of Ireland, north and south, in the face of considerable uncertainty and disruption. We owe a great debt of gratitude to our priests and to the many volunteers whose continued dedication has ensured that our churches have remained very safe places to gather for Mass and the Sacraments. We have also been blessed in the commitment of our school communities who have been supporting our young people in very demanding circumstances, including assisting with their preparation for the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

Now that more restrictive measures are being put in place, we encourage people to persevere and not to lose heart. Faith and prayer, in the home and in church can be a huge support in difficult times. While we fully support the guidance of the public health authorities, we will continue to engage constructively in the coming days with the civil authorities to ensure that our people have continued access to the support of Mass and the Sacraments and essential spiritual nourishment for these challenging times. The communal celebration of Mass and the Sacraments – even with restricted numbers - is at the very heart of what it means for us to be a Christian community. These are not simply 'gatherings' of people, but profound expressions of who we are as a Church. For parishes, and individual Catholics, the loss of these spiritual supports can be a source of great anxiety, and fear, and can have a detrimental impact on their overall health and well-being.

This year, the month of November, in which we traditionally remember the dead and pray for the bereaved, will be particularly poignant. We sense a huge yearning for consolation and hope in the heart of our people. We are especially mindful in 2020 of those grieving families, who, because of restrictions, have been unable to experience the customary spiritual and community supports which are so much part of our Irish tradition. On 1 November at 3.00pm the bishops and priests of Ireland will lead a short service of prayer to dedicate the month of November to 'Remembrance of the Dead and Prayer for the Bereaved'. We invite the whole country to unite in this moment which will be followed by parish liturgies throughout the month of November, reaching out as much as possible to those who cannot be physically present.

Advent and Christmas are likely to be very different this year. Advent, as a time of patient, hopeful waiting and longing, will have a particular resonance in these times, while the much-needed joy of Christmas may well be tempered by the impact of restrictions. We encourage parish communities to explore creatively ways in which the hope of Advent and the joy of Christmas can be realised and safely celebrated.

Pope Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti*, presents the example of the Good Samaritan and urges us to draw close to the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. We are conscious that the pandemic has

seriously impacted the livelihoods of many Irish families. The plight of poor and homeless people, and the needs of our elderly and vulnerable, have been thrown into stark relief.

The pandemic has also heightened our consciousness of suffering further afield. The pandemic is a global phenomenon. It has impacted most severely on people around the world who are already seriously disadvantaged in terms of poverty and lack of access to healthcare. Although we are faced with difficult challenges in our own lives and our own land, let us not forget the need for solidarity with all our brothers and sisters who are suffering throughout the world.

The courage, compassion and generosity of Irish people during the pandemic – especially that of our health workers, carers, priests and others working in essential services – has been uplifting and inspiring. In this mission month of October, we appeal for your support for Trócaire, Saint Vincent de Paul Society, our missionaries and other charities who are reaching out to the poorest and most in need – both at home and in the furthest corners of the world. Let us not *'pass by on the other side'*, but, in the example of Christ, open our hearts and reach out our hands in response to their great need.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eamon Martin".

**Eamon Martin**  
**Archbishop of Armagh**