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17<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Our President, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa declared the COVID-19 virus as a national disaster in his address on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference fully supports the call to take serious and drastic measures to prevent the spread of Corona Virus in our country.

The President has set the limit to a maximum of 100 people at any public gathering. After consultation with the leadership of the Diocese and advice from the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, I would like to propose the following:

1. A dispensation from the normal obligations to attend Sunday Mass and the other Celebrations of the Easter Season will be granted to all those who may have pre-existing health conditions, the elderly, young children and parents of young children.
2. All faithful are granted dispensation to attend a weekday Mass in order to fulfil their Sunday obligation.
3. All Diocesan, deanery and parish gatherings/events are to be cancelled or postponed.
4. Follow the guidance/advice as set out by the Department of Health.

Most parishes have already instituted precautions such as holy water fonts have been removed, the practice of holding/shaking hands during the liturgy has been stopped, communion is being received on the hand, the precious blood is not being distributed and the ritual when visiting the sick and homebound has been changed. I thank all those parishes and Priests for their co-operation.

With reference to my letter dated 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, I reiterate the following:

**Precautions:**

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue away immediately.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

At this stage, no confirmed cases of the virus have been reported in the Eastern Cape. I have received notification that the outcome of the COVID-19 test performed on a parent from St. Dominic's Priory school has come back as negative, the parent has not contracted the virus. I urge communities not to panic but take the necessary precautions as stated above and keep abreast of any new announcements issued from our health department.

Let us remember to pray for all those who have died, who are infected and who are separated from loved ones as a result of the Corona Virus.

May God bless and be with us all during this Pandemic.

Yours Sincerely in Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bishop VM Zungu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a cross at the beginning.

Bishop VM Zungu