



COVID-19 UPDATE FOR CLERGY

18 August 2020

Covid-Safe Businesses

Thank you for completing your Covid-Safe Plans and registering as Covid-Safe Businesses. Any parishes yet to register, please contact the Chancery staff for assistance with this process.

Face Masks

Evidence is clear that close contact at church, or at weddings or funerals, has resulted in community transmission of COVID-19 in Australia and overseas. Evidence is also clear that face-masks dramatically reduce the risk of spread. (see attached article or follow this link: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-06/mask-order-helped-avert-coronavirus-outbreak-in-sydney-aged-care/12527518>)

Health authorities recommend the use of a mask in situations where social distancing is difficult, e.g. on public transport and at religious gatherings. The Premier has asked (but not yet required) that churchgoers wear masks at Church. Rather than get to the point of having further restrictions placed on our attendance numbers or of having mask-wearing imposed on all church attendees, I ask that in addition to all requirements around social distancing and hygiene, **parishioners be exhorted to wear masks at Mass**. We should lead by example by wearing masks when we are unable to spatially distance. I will, and I would ask **all priests to, wear a mask**: when meeting people before and after Mass, while distributing Holy Communion, while administering other sacraments such as Baptism and Anointing of the Sick. Please also likewise examine your practices when hearing Confessions, counselling or otherwise meeting parishioners 'close up'.

With the assistance of Fr Thomas Casanova and some of his parishioners, the Diocese is providing each priest with two washable, reusable face masks made to the standard recommended by the Australian Government Department of Health. We will have these masks delivered to all clergy in the coming days. Please explain the need for mask-wearing this weekend and begin using them on Saturday 24th August. We are grateful to Holy Trinity Parish for the masks.

Covid-19 - Stay Updated

As the Covid-19 situation is constantly evolving, I encourage you to stay up to date with the current requirements for NSW via the following website: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19> We will continue to monitor the situation and update the Protocols and advice as required.

Diocese of Wagga Wagga Plan in the Event of a Covid-19 Notification

We are developing a pack to assist you to prepare the documents and records that will be required in the event you receive notification from NSW Health of a positive case of Covid-19 in your parish.

This "pack" contains the following information:

- Records and details you will be required to provide NSW Health
- Questions to ask and information to collect
- Who you should notify
- How the Diocese can assist the parish
- When to self-isolate

We recommend you prepare your documents, ensure your attendance records, parish database and contact details are up to date, and keep this information readily available.

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Most Rev Mark Edwards OMI, Bishop of Wagga Wagga

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Covid-19 Testing

Under no circumstances should anyone awaiting Covid-19 test results (even without presenting symptoms) attend a church or parish setting until a negative diagnosis is confirmed. Additionally, under no circumstances should anyone who is closely connected to people who are awaiting test results or who have tested positive attend.

Funerals during Covid-19

There is some anecdotal evidence of Funeral Directors being less than stringent in their planning and their processes with regard to the government regulations for Covid-19. Our churches and our people ultimately remain our responsibility.

Ensure Funeral Directors:

- have a clear understanding of the maximum capacity of your church with regard to the “4 square metre rule”;
- are keeping an Attendance List (separate to the usual Condolence Book); and
- are practicing hand hygiene with regard to the use of pens for attendees.

Yours in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M Edwards OMI". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

+Mark Edwards OMI
Bishop of Wagga Wagga

How this Sydney aged-care home averted a coronavirus disaster

By [Ursula Malone](#)

Posted ThuThursday 6 AugAugust 2020 at 5:11am, updated ThuThursday 6 AugAugust 2020 at 10:43am

It's a stark contrast to the aged-care disaster unfolding in Victoria — a group of nurses clapping and dancing in a nursing home, celebrating a major win against the coronavirus. The impromptu party at the facility in Sydney's inner west was sparked after confirmation it had averted a COVID-19 outbreak, despite an employee working while infected with the virus last month.

An email sent hours before her shift started at Ashfield Baptist Homes could be behind the success.

In Melbourne, more than 300 nursing home residents infected with the virus have been transferred to hospitals, and yesterday 12 of the state's 15 COVID-19 deaths were linked to aged care. The Ashfield facility, and its 136 elderly residents, was also vulnerable when the employee turned up for her night shift at 10:00pm on July 15.

Unbeknownst to anyone, she had contracted the virus six days earlier while having dinner at the Thai Rock restaurant in Wetherill Park — a cluster which has since been linked to more than 100 COVID-19 infections. However, an email sent by the Sydney Local Health District (SLHD) just five hours earlier is believed to have been critical in stopping the nurse infecting elderly residents inside the facility.

After a small rise in the number of coronavirus infections in NSW, the email advised staff at aged-care homes to wear face masks while on shift. The Ashfield facility's management acted immediately, instructing staff to wear masks along with the protective gowns and gloves they were already using.

Two days later, the care home got the call from contact tracers from the SLHD informing them of possible exposure. "To be honest there was a certain inevitability about it given what's happening in the local community," the facility's chief executive Leigh Kildey said.

"I feel any aged-care provider would probably feel the same, you're operating in an environment where you're just waiting for that call." Within an hour of being notified about the possible exposure, the facility was in lockdown. It's impossible to know how many residents could have been infected had she not been wearing a mask. "We certainly feel really fortunate ... we had the systems in place to be able to react really quickly to the directive," Ms Kildey said.

It was a scenario similar to the Newmarch House aged care home in Western Sydney, where a staff member had worked while unknowingly infected with the virus. In that case, 37 residents and 34 staff became infected and 19 residents died. At Ashfield Baptist Homes, there were fears they were heading for a similar catastrophe.

"Before the first round of testing most definitely, you play out those scenarios in your mind," Ms Kildey said. "Once COVID-19 comes into a setting where the population's quite vulnerable, it can have a catastrophic outcome regardless of the good systems that are in place."

She said lessons learnt from Newmarch House meant a specialist infection control team from NSW Health moved in immediately. "What worked well for us was welcoming the advice that we received from our local health district and the Public Health Unit," Ms Kildey said.

She also credits another key decision taken back in March. "We put all of our staff in surgical scrubs and we did that very deliberately so that we could launder and dry the scrubs at a certain temperature to kill any virus," she said. "We did that conscious of the fact that a lot of our staff catch public transport to and from work and it's really about a risk mitigation strategy to try to stop any potential contact coming in."

This week, families gathered in the car park outside the care home to thank the staff for keeping their relatives safe. Wesley Stokes said he'd been really worried about his 84-year-old mother Elaine who suffers from dementia.

"I'm hearing so many stories of nursing homes and issues happening in nursing, especially down in Victoria," he said. "I really feel for people in Victoria in nursing homes at the moment. "Just having a slight scare here was worrying enough, let alone having COVID going right into the nursing home."