



Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv DD STL
Bishop of Parramatta

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Pastoral letter to the people of Parramatta during the coronavirus crisis and Christmas 2020

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Before the news about the COVID-19 cluster appearing in the Northern Beaches of Sydney came out, many of us were feeling a little more confident that we might have put the worst of the pandemic restrictions behind us.

Since our churches are now subject to the 4 metre square rule, the number of faithful that can attend church is, again, limited. For some of our parishes, this number remains relatively few compared to pre-pandemic numbers. Some of our large capacity churches can increase their numbers.

It was on 20th March 2020 that I decreed that, in accordance with Canons 85 and 87, Catholics are dispensed from their Sunday obligation to attend Mass (Canon 1247). This decree remains in force and will do so for the foreseeable future.

I shall await advice from the health authorities and the NSW Government before rescinding this decree. The obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (Each Sunday, the Feast of the Assumption and Christmas Day in Australia) is fully explained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2180-2188).

At this time, the course of how the pandemic will affect us throughout Australia is still unclear. However, there are signs that we as a nation have successfully beaten the worst ravages of this new virus. We can be a bit more confident about social interaction. Therefore, I would encourage you to attend Masses at your local churches or wherever you normally worship as we enter the Christmas season.

We all know how much the celebration of the Eucharist means to nurturing our faith at the best of times. Even at these pandemic times, I suggest you think about returning to Mass each Sunday.

However, if you still feel in any way vulnerable or unsafe in returning to your parish church, then stay at home. You have probably accessed the many offerings online of the celebration of the Eucharist. These are still available.

Remember that the Eucharist is firstly about our community's expression of faith and love for God and in each other. To support this belief, we apply the obligation to attend whenever and wherever possible.

I wish you all a very happy and holy Christmas in the company of the God who values us, his people, so much that he sent his only Son as our brother and Redeemer in the blessed and helpless baby Jesus of Bethlehem.

A handwritten signature in green ink, reading "Vincent Long Van Nguyen".

**Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv
Bishop of Parramatta**

*Given at Parramatta on 22 December 2020
Tuesday of 4th Week of Advent*