

23 March 2020

Update on Arrangements for Church Buildings During COVID-19 Pandemic Event

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In response to the Prime Minister's press conference of Sunday evening, 22 March, 2020, announcing the closing of various facilities to the public – including places of worship – the NSW Minister for Health and Medical Research, has made an Order under section 7 of the *Public Health Act 2010*. I have attached a copy of the *Public Health (COVID-19 Places of Social Gathering) Order 2020* for your information.

The pertinent details of the Order, as far as we are concerned, can be found in section 5(1)(h):

5 Direction of the Minister

- (1) The Minister directs that the following must not be open to members of the public except as provided in this clause—
 - (h) places of public worship, except for the purposes of conducting wedding services or funeral services.

Our advice is that this means, regrettably, all of our church buildings need to be closed and locked, except when weddings and funerals are arranged.

Baptisms are not mentioned in the Order, so at this stage we must advise parents wishing to have their children baptised that we are unable to do so, and offer them opportunity to delay the baptism until after the restrictions are lifted. Your continuing pastoral care of parents in these circumstances is appreciated.

A reminder that when weddings and funerals are celebrated in our church buildings, we are still limited to no more than 100 persons and obliged to observe the 4sq.m. per attendee requirement.

Having spoken with Bishop Bill, I must reluctantly direct you to ensure that your church buildings – including chapels attached to schools or religious houses – are closed to the public with immediate effect and for the foreseeable future.

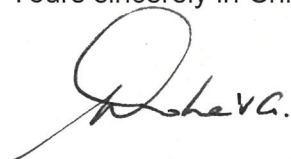
I will be writing this afternoon to the NSW Minister for Health and Medical Research, Mr Brad Hazzard, to make representations to the Minister in the hope that alterations might be made to the Order to permit members of the diocesan community to avail themselves of their church buildings for prayer and solace

in the face of the current pandemic event. I cannot foresee what kind of response I might receive to such representations, but the Bishop's Office will keep you informed of any developments.

In the meantime, if you or members of the diocesan community were so inclined, you might like to make your own representations to the Minister.

Your cooperation with the new requirements established by the Order is much appreciated, as is your continuing commitment to the pastoral care of the diocesan community. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely in Christ,



Rev Andrew Doohan VG

VICAR GENERAL, DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE



New South Wales

Public Health (COVID-19 Places of Social Gathering) Order 2020

under the

Public Health Act 2010

I, Brad Hazzard, the Minister for Health and Medical Research, under section 7 of the *Public Health Act 2010*, make the following Order.

Dated 23 March 2020.

BRAD HAZZARD
Minister for Health and Medical Research

Explanatory note

The object of this Order is to deal with the public health risk of COVID-19 and its possible consequences by giving a Ministerial direction that provides that certain non-essential venues be closed to members of the public except in limited circumstances.

Section 10 of the *Public Health Act 2010* creates an offence if an individual fails to comply with a direction with a maximum penalty of imprisonment for 6 months or a fine of up to \$11,000 (or both) plus a further \$5,500 fine each day the offence continues. Corporations that fail to comply with a direction are liable to a fine of \$55,000 and \$27,500 each day the offence continues.

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Public Health (COVID-19 Places of Social Gathering) Order 2020

under the

Public Health Act 2010

1 Name of Order

This Order is the *Public Health (COVID-19 Places of Social Gathering) Order 2020*.

2 Commencement

This Order commences at 12 noon on 23 March 2020.

3 Definitions

(1) In this Order:

the Act means the *Public Health Act 2010*.

Note. The Act and the *Interpretation Act 1987* contain definitions and other provisions that affect the interpretation and application of this Order.

(2) Notes included in this Order do not form part of this Order.

4 Grounds for concluding that there is a risk to public health

It is noted that the basis for concluding that a situation has arisen that is, or is likely to be, a risk to public health is as follows—

- (a) public health authorities both internationally and in Australia have been monitoring international outbreaks of COVID-19, also known as Novel Coronavirus 2019,
- (b) COVID-19 is a potentially fatal condition and is also highly contagious,
- (c) a number of cases of individuals with COVID-19 have now been confirmed in New South Wales, as well as other Australian jurisdictions.

5 Direction of the Minister

(1) The Minister directs that the following must not be open to members of the public except as provided in this clause—

- (a) pubs and registered clubs, except for the purposes of—
 - (i) selling food or beverages for persons to consume off the premises, or
 - (ii) if the premises include hotel or motel accommodation, providing that accommodation including by providing food or beverages to persons using that accommodation to consume in their rooms,
- (b) food and drink premises (other than pubs), except for the purposes of—
 - (i) selling food or beverages for persons to consume off the premises, or
 - (ii) if the premises are part of hotel or motel accommodation, providing food or beverages to persons using that accommodation to consume in their rooms,
- (c) entertainment facilities,

- (d) amusement centres,
 - (e) casinos, except for the purposes of, if the premises include hotel or motel accommodation, providing that accommodation including by providing food or beverages to persons using that accommodation to consume in their rooms,
 - (f) micro-breweries or small distilleries holding a drink on-premises authorisation under the *Liquor Act 2007* or cellar door premises, except for the purposes of selling food or beverages for persons to consume off the premises,
 - (g) recreation facilities (indoor),
 - (h) places of public worship, except for the purposes of conducting wedding services or funeral services.
- (2) The Minister may grant an exemption to this clause in writing and subject to the conditions that the Minister considers appropriate.
- (3) A word or expression used in this clause has the same meaning as it has in the Standard Instrument set out in the *Standard Instrument (Local Environmental Plans) Order 2006*.

Note. The Standard Instrument includes the following definitions—

Amusement centre means a building or place (not being part of a pub or registered club) used principally for playing—

- (a) billiards, pool or other like games, or
- (b) electronic or mechanical amusement devices, such as pinball machines, computer or video games and the like.

Cellar door premises means a building or place that is used to sell wine by retail and that is situated on land on which there is a commercial vineyard, and where most of the wine offered for sale is produced in a winery situated on that land or is produced predominantly from grapes grown in the surrounding area.

Entertainment facility means a theatre, cinema, music hall, concert hall, dance hall and the like.

Food and drink premises means premises that are used for the preparation and retail sale of food or drink (or both) for immediate consumption on or off the premises, and includes a restaurant or cafe, take away food and drink premises, a pub or a small bar.

Place of public worship means a building or place used for the purpose of religious worship by a congregation or religious group, whether or not the building or place is also used for counselling, social events, instruction or religious training.

Pub means licensed premises under the *Liquor Act 2007* the principal purpose of which is the retail sale of liquor for consumption on the premises, whether or not the premises include hotel or motel accommodation and whether or not food is sold or entertainment is provided on the premises.

Recreation facility (indoor) means a building or place used predominantly for indoor recreation, whether or not operated for the purposes of gain, including a squash court, indoor swimming pool, gymnasium, table tennis centre, health studio, bowling alley, ice rink or any other building or place of a like character used for indoor recreation.

Registered club means a club that holds a club licence under the *Liquor Act 2007*.

Reference number:(n2020-803)