

**Pastoral Letter**  
**On the Recovery of Parish Life after Lockdown.**  
**September 2020**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I want to write to you as lockdown relaxes and our schools return after summer holidays, and as our churches recommence public Masses and plan for the full resumption of parish life in the months ahead.

Above all, I want to commend and thank our parish priests and you, our parishioners, for coming together so marvellously and getting through the lockdown as a strong family of faith. I know how difficult life has been for you behind the scenes and yet, despite so many anxieties and upsets, your response in faith has been quite exemplary.

I want to thank our parish priests for their heroic efforts in reaching out to our sick and dying, in burying our loved ones and ensuring you were involved and comforted during their funeral rites. I thank our priests who reached out to you online and ensured you could participate in parish Masses and Devotions, or who buoyed you up in your faith with online Teachings and Reflections.

I want to thank you, too, for the equally heroic way you supported our priests and parishes by attending online Masses, or sending in your offertory collections or helping to get parish websites and bulletins up and running.

It is difficult to express our gladness as our churches opened for private prayers and public Masses, nor the joy of our first gatherings for Sunday Mass. Many of you immediately came to Mass, made possible by the generosity of our priests who put on extra Masses so that as many of you as possible could attend. I warmly encourage them to keep up this practice until the restrictions are relaxed. It was also down to the gargantuan efforts of parish volunteers who got booking systems up and running and supplied an army of volunteers to sanitise our churches.

As our schools have reopened, our parish priests and Head Teachers, both Primary and Secondary, have worked together in the most impressive way to see to First Holy Communion and Confirmations that were postponed in lockdown. I can honestly say I have never seen our parishes, schools and parents work so well together, and with one heart, to ensure our young ones experience their Big Day of receiving the Sacraments. By all accounts these celebrations have been truly beautiful occasions.

I also commend Monsignor Gerry Gallagher, Fr. Paul Brady, Canon Tom Boyle and our Office staff who kept us well advised and up to date on infection control protocols coming from the Scottish Government and the Bishops Conference. It is to their credit that, God willing, there have been no cases of infection in our churches.

Truly, I believe our parishes have grown stronger than ever during this terrible Pandemic and I thank God for this great blessing.

Now of course, allowing for the virus to be kept in check we are beginning to think of parish life getting back up and running as fully as we can.

We have been blessed to have had well-resourced online provision for Mass during lockdown but we know nothing replaces our in-church participation when it is possible. Here, I think of grandparents who told me of their comfort at seeing and chatting to their grandchildren socially through *Facetime* during the lockdown when they could not meet up in person. This online connection with their families was an unexpected blessing of new technology and, frankly, who knows how they would have coped without it. But, as soon as they were allowed to see their grandchildren in person they jumped at the opportunity, and could not express their joy at meeting them in their homes and give them a hug.

I think it is the same with our Sunday Masses, the heart and soul of our life as a Christian community. While we were not able to be in church, our online Masses have been such a godsend. Yet nothing compares to being in church for Sunday Mass with our parish family and receiving Jesus physically in Holy Communion. That is why, while for Catholics not in a condition to come to church our online Masses will be an ongoing blessing, for healthy Catholics who can come to church they can never be a substitute.

Now we look forward to some recovery of our parish life with the safe return of ministries like RCIA, parish groups and associations like SSVP and Legion of Mary, and Prayer and Devotion groups and the like.

Our own Diocesan Office has produced a Revised Calendar till the end of 2020 and our watchword is that: *The show goes on*, even if in different ways and with a new blend of online and in person ministries and gatherings. In that regard I want to commend all those parishes who have their Parish Councils meeting online to produce their own Parish Pastoral Plans till the end of the year.

All in all, we can be well satisfied with how we have risen to the challenge of the Pandemic as a Church so far. Let us keep it going through prayer and dedication to our parishes so that we can return to full parish life as soon as God wills and all the better for this unprecedented experience.

With every blessing.

Bishop John