



**Pastoral letter to the Priests, Pastoral Leaders and People of the Diocese of Geraldton
In the time of Pandemic 19 March 2020**

This time last year I could never have imagined myself, as Bishop of Geraldton, contemplating cancelling Public Mass throughout our vast Diocese. In the past, as Parish Priest of Karratha, I remember Sunday Mass being cancelled because of a Red Alert at an approaching cyclone: an experience many of you also had this year.

What we are facing at this time is a virus, COVID-19. It has crossed all our borders, cultures, religions and affected everyone's life. This virus has changed the way we do things. This has happened to me and many others coming back from overseas. My recent visit to India went very well meeting once again Fr Alby George, his family and Bishop. Many of you would remember Fr Alby who served in our Diocese recently. While in India I also finally meet the Sisters who have been nominated by their Superior to continue the wonderful ministry begun by the Daughter of Charity in Port and South Hedland. I am now very happy to comply with the Government's requirement to quarantine myself until Tuesday, 31 March. Many of you are doing the same to help maximise our level of protection here in Australia. This is what we do as a community looking out for each other.

This time can be very unsettling and often raises in us a sense of panic and fear. My Directive applies to myself and everyone in the Diocese of Geraldton, even if a number of our communities are very small. Some though might think it unnecessary for everyone to put into practise these measures. My Directive is a call to each one of us to care and support each other and our wider communities, whether we are in Port Hedland, Mt Magnet, Dongara or Geraldton through all the Government's measures.

Many examples of support are happening in and around our community and I give thanks for that. As a Catholic People, our greatest gift to the community is hope, and focussing on what matters most in our lives: families, friends, senior citizens and Aboriginal People.

Many bishops have referred to this time as like being on a retreat, where all those things that distracted us from what matters most in our lives, are put to one side. I would like to offer to you a passage of Scripture for reflection to guide you through these days.

This passage from St Paul's Letter to the Roman Christians 8: 28-39 has always given me great hope when at times life, and decisions to be made, has not been easy or clear for myself. We are not alone; our God is even closer to us now in these difficult times.

"For I am certain of this: that neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8 38-39)

The Roman Christians lived in very uncertain times where their very lives were under constant threat. St Paul wrote these words of hope to strengthen the community and ensure them that Jesus will never abandon them, nor us. He will be there with our fears and concerns and for our community.

When I was Parish Priest of Karratha it was the practice of the Parish Community to give a thank you card for parishioners who were leaving. On the card were these words from Romans 8:28, *"We know that by turning everything to their good God cooperates with all those who love him."* In the midst of this crisis, there is so much good.

I give thanks for all we are doing to care for each other. For the doctors, nurses and medical staff who are caring for those who are sick. For those who are reaching out and caring for those families who have already lost loved ones to the virus. Their work and ministry is good and I give thanks and praise for their tireless commitment and generosity.

I pray too for those who are working on understanding this virus so as to help save lives and help restore our communities to be a safer place to live and work. I pray also for our Leaders in local church communities and civil community, that their leadership lead us all through to a better place once this crisis is over.

One of the prayers I pray quite often in my chapel, and will pray often over these coming months comes from St Theresa of Avila,

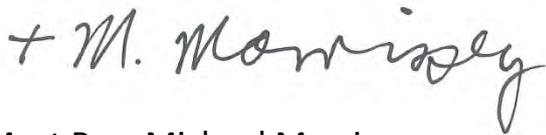
*Let nothing disturb you,
let nothing frighten you,
he who has God
nothing lacks:
God alone suffices.*

Our Priests will be offering the Mass for you every day and will remember your families and friends, deepening that spiritual connection which comes from our common faith in Jesus Christ.

Recently there was this beautiful vision of Pope Francis walking through the deserted streets of Rome to pray at the image of our Lady of Health. We will do the same and pray for each other.

I entrust you all in our Diocese, Australia and around the world to the intercession of our Lady, Help of Christians, of Lourdes and Good Health.

God bless you all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ M. Morrissey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Rev. Michael Morrissey
Bishop of Geraldton