



Archdiocese of Southwark

Statement from Archbishop John Wilson

To the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Southwark following the Prime Minister's Address to the Nation concerning the Coronavirus

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ

In his Address to the Nation the Prime Minister outlined the necessary steps that we must now take to combat the spread of the Coronavirus. The Government has mandated the *'closure of all shops selling non-essential goods, including clothing and electronic stores, and other premises including libraries, playgrounds and outdoor gyms, and places of worship.'*

This means that, until further notice, and with immediate effect, all the churches and chapels within the Archdiocese of Southwark, together with their associated halls, must now close their doors to the public. This policy must be implemented without exception. It is imperative that we, the clergy, consecrated religious, and laity of the Archdiocese of Southwark, comply fully with these directives. This is an essential component of our contribution to fighting the Coronavirus and living out the Lord Jesus' commandment to *'love our neighbour.'* (Mk 12:31)

Given that our priests live adjacent to their churches, there will still be the private celebration of Mass each day, but there must be no additional people present other than the priest himself. The doors to all our churches and chapels must remain permanently locked until these restrictions are lifted.

The Prime Minister also stated that all social events, including weddings, baptisms and other ceremonies, but excluding funerals, must cease. The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales have already put in place restrictive

measures in relation to baptisms, marriages and funerals which must continue to be followed.

Although we are socially isolate from each other, we are not isolate from Christ. Now is a time to strengthen our spiritual bonds of connection through personal prayer and the intensification of our inner relationship with Christ. We will continue to use social media to sustain our communal online presence, with the live-streaming of Mass and devotions from different churches within our Archdiocese and beyond. For the time being, our buildings must close; but our hearts must open wider, expanding with love for Christ and others.

Dear friends, the yearning in our hearts for the Eucharist and for fellowship with one another must sustain us until we come, once more, to gather at the altar to offer together the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We take inspiration from the Apostle St Paul writing to the first Christians in Rome: *'...hardship develops perseverance, perseverance develops character, character produces hope and hope does not disappoint, since the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us.'* (Rom 5:3-5) We are people of profound hope. We will remain firm in faith and generous in charity, through Christ the *'hope of glory,'* alive within us. (cf. Col 1:27)

Let us pray for all those working to overcome the effects of the Coronavirus and all those affected by it. Please also be sure of my prayers for you, for your families and for your loved ones. And, please, pray for me and all your bishops, priests, and deacons, who hold you in their hearts and prayers.

With every blessing

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a series of loops and a horizontal line at the end.

The Most Reverend John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark

Given at Archbishop's House, Southwark, 23 March 2020