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Hello Everyone,

As you would be aware, the Victorian government has announced a state-wide lockdown from midnight on Thursday July 15 till midnight on Tuesday July 20. Having experienced several lockdowns previously, we may all be familiar with what is involved. However, it may be helpful to have some notes to remind us as to how the lockdown will affect religious services for the next five days. The following points are drawn from the Victorian government website.

For the five days of the lockdown, all places of worship in Victoria are closed for private worship or religious ceremonies. Ceremonies and services can be recorded or broadcast live from the place of worship for viewing online. Only those who are necessary to conduct the ceremony may be on site to record and live stream services (up to 5 people). Gatherings for the purposes of worship, prayer groups, or any other religious purposes may only occur remotely.

Places of worship may be opened for the purposes of conducting permitted weddings or funerals, but there are strict limits on the number of people who can attend.

A place of worship may host a funeral, but attendance will be limited to 10 people plus those required to conduct the funeral.

Weddings are not permitted indoors or outdoors unless one or both people getting married are at the end of life or would otherwise be deported. In these exceptional cases, only five people can attend the wedding - the couple being married, two witnesses and the celebrant.

During these days of lockdown, we will not be able to gather for worship as we usually do. However, we can still pray in our homes. I encourage you in your personal prayer and your prayer as a family. Our diocesan website has information about links to online Masses and other prayer resources at <https://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/coronavirus-the-churchs-information-and-advice-2/#links-to-masses-online>

May Christ be with you through these five days and in all the day ahead.

God bless you all.

Bishop Paul