



22 May 2020

The Prime Minister  
Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern  
Members of Cabinet  
Parliament, Wellington

By email

Tēnā koutou Prime Minister & Cabinet Members,

**Re: Faith services during Level 2**

We write ahead of your decision this coming Monday about gatherings under Alert Level 2. On behalf of Catholic parish leaders, Priests and parishioners, and indeed members of all faith organisations of Aotearoa, we urge you to consider raising the number allowed to gather for faith services to at least 100.

We were disappointed with the earlier decision that this was limited to 10, considering the lack of similar restrictions on restaurants, bars, clubs and brothels, which operate under circumstances somewhat more difficult for contact tracing and distancing. We do recognise however that faith communities have certainly had time to prepare and consider how to hold services that meet health guidelines.

Less than 100 people would pose a significant challenge to our large, diverse communities where there is certainly space for 100 people or more with distancing. Limits of 20 or 50 people would mean turning even more people away, and at the heart of all faith communities in New Zealand is welcome and support for all.

Further, we would not wish to ask faith leaders to hold more services, overburdening those that already put unceasing energy into providing pastoral support to their communities. We also have every confidence that our smaller parishes will restrict numbers if they are not able to accommodate the permitted maximum in a safe manner.

We note today conflicting guidance from the NZ Police and the Ministry of Health. The Police at 8.25am issued guidelines dated 20 May, which say a church service is not a “gathering” if groups of 10 are seated more than 2m apart from each other. The Ministry issued a statement at 1pm reiterating advice that gatherings are limited to 10 people. We urge the government to ensure advice is clear and consistent in order that our leadership may be the same.

Our faith communities have been making the necessary preparations. They are aware they can only reopen when all the health guidelines can be strictly followed. We have had faith in the Government and health authority restrictions to date. We ask the same courtesy that the Government has faith in our faith communities.

We thank you for considering the above points and for your leadership during this time.

Mā te Atua koutou e manaaki, e tiaki / May God Bless you and protect you

- ✠ Patrick Dunn, Bishop of Auckland and NZCBC President
- ✠ John Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington and NZCBC Vice President
- ✠ Stephen Lowe, Bishop of Hamilton and NZCBC Secretary
- ✠ Paul Martin SM, Bishop of Christchurch
- ✠ Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin
- ✠ Michael Gielen, Auxiliary Bishop of Auckland