

## THE PARISH IN THE TURBULENT TIMES OF THE CORONA VIRUS

The events surrounding the spread of the corona virus are developing quickly. Our towns suddenly look very different. This has been a reason for the pastoral team to get together and discuss what we should do in the two parishes of Our Lady of Sion (Den Hoorn, Schipluiden, Maasland) and St. Ursula (Delft).

We do this as Christian and faith-filled people, who are deeply aware that our life is kept safe in God's protecting hand and that we can go on without fear; but also in the conscience that we should take prudent measures in the way that we structure our parish life during this time.

This has led us to take certain measures, effective immediately.

1. Since the weekend of 14/15 March we know that the celebration of the Eucharist or other public liturgical celebrations are no longer permitted on **Sundays**, including the vigil Masses on Saturday evenings. The bishops of the Netherlands have taken this decision together and of course we follow this urgent appeal. We have thought about how to continue and have decided that from 22 March onwards, a **livestreamed Mass** will be organized in the Maria van Jesse Church in Delft. This Mass itself will not be public, but will be available to follow for all parishioners through modern means of communication; see the parish website [rkdelft.nl](http://rkdelft.nl). This Mass can be followed live on Sundays from 10.00 onwards. After that, all churches will be opened for an hour, for personal prayer or lighting candles. On Palm Sunday, blessed palm branches will be available in all churches. On Sunday evening between 18.00 and 19.00, the Blessed Sacrament will be exposed in the Maria van Jesse and you are cordially invited to come and pray. Opportunity will also be provided to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
2. We have decided to cancel the **weekday Masses**, starting immediately. This is because of multiple considerations: many people who are present at these Masses are in the age category to which our Health Institute (the RIVM) has emphatically recommended social abstinence, and the physical distance rule will be difficult to observe. Also part of the consideration is that physical contact between the celebrant and the parishioner cannot always be avoided during the distribution of Communion.
3. All public **catechetical, diaconal and other activities** will be cancelled until further notice. This also applies to **board meetings** and similar gatherings. The **choir rehearsals** also can no longer take place. The announced **24 hours for the Lord** on 20-21 March will be cancelled. We try to offer certain programs, like First Communion preparation, online. Hard work is being done to get this up and running.
4. With regard to **funerals** we will observe the directives given by the government and the funeral organizations. Please contact the funeral planner. Funerals will be liturgies of the Word and prayer only: there will be no distribution of Communion. We do offer the possibility of having a memorial service later: a tradition still current in some parts of our global Church.
5. With regard to the reception of **Holy Baptism**, we recommend to contact the group in charge of preparation and/or the pastor who will celebrate the sacrament, to discuss what the best solution is.
6. To safeguard the health of our parishioners, the pastoral team would like to limit home visits to a minimum. This does not mean that we cannot be reached. We are available for telephone calls and through other social media. If urgently desired and necessary, we will not hesitate to come to you or make an appointment in a church office.
7. No doubt questions will remain, and other questions will arise. Do feel free to contact one of the members of the pastoral team.

As you might expect, we take these measures with a heavy heart. The Church, and we who are called and honored to serve the Church, are outward-oriented as much as possible, and have no greater joy than welcoming as many people as possible in our community of faith. Taking these steps feels burdensome. At the same time, we must use our God-given mind and have the courage to act in accordance with the knowledge we have today. All this while keeping in mind the well-being of the entire human being, body and soul.

Have we been crippled by a virus? Of course we do not think so. The church does not stop during the time that we have to be extra careful in our mutual interaction. We are more than celebrations and meetings. Thankfully, there is a deep-rooted tradition of prayer and intercession which everyone can practise individually. We cordially call ourselves and you to attend to and develop this life of prayer. It will bring good to you and to the world.

To help you on your way: here is a prayer the bishops have recommended to us:

God, refuge in our necessity,  
strength in our doubt and fear,  
comfort in sickness and suffering.  
Be near and graceful to us, to your people,  
as we all experience the effects  
of the spread of the corona virus.  
Be a Protector for those  
who have fallen prey to this virus;  
we pray that they may have hope and healing.  
We pray for those who have died of this virus,  
that they may be sheltered and at peace.  
We pray for all those working  
in health services and public government,  
that they may experience your nearness and blessing in their work  
for the good of all society.  
Make us aware of the richness of your love for each of us,  
and be with us as we sense the fragility of our life.  
Strengthen our faith and our hope,  
that we may keep abandoning ourselves fearlessly  
to your fatherly providence.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

On behalf of the pastoral team,

Fr. D. Verbakel