



29 August 2021

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On Wednesday our Diocese moves to Level 3 as our country seeks to contain the outbreak of the Delta variant of Covid-19. International media questioned why we went into lockdown so quickly with one case detected. Despite the lockdown there are now 511 cases in the community, which is a good indicator of how rapidly this variant can spread.

The Level 3 restrictions prohibit gatherings of more than 10 people. Weddings, funerals and tangihanga gatherings of up to 10 people are permitted. Accordingly, in light of the measures taken by the New Zealand Government for the common good for the safety of all people in light of the Covid-19 pandemic **all weekday and Sunday Masses with a congregation in the Hamilton Diocese remain suspended while the country remains at Alert Level 3.**

The authorities want us to remain at home as much as possible during Level 3. Accordingly I asked that your **parish churches remain closed while we are in Level 3.** There was an old devotional practice of blessing oneself when driving past a Catholic church as a recognition that Christ in his Blessed Sacrament dwells within. If you pass by your church as part of your exercise or driving to a supermarket etc, you may wish to stop and pray outside.

Level 3 allows for **urgent sacramental care.** Your local priests have been issued with the protocols that are to be followed. In the meantime regular Holy Communion to and visiting of the Sick remains suspended. The normal provision of the Sacrament of Reconciliation remains suspended.

Provisions for Level 2 are being worked on but we can expect that it will be normative for masks to be worn at Mass. People will have to scan or sign in for Mass. This will be challenging for some people. Can I ask that you do not make an issue of this and other provisions that are being made to protect life, especially those who are most vulnerable.

As I wrote last year, can I take this opportunity to thank you for your patience and acceptance of the restrictions we have had in place at present. These are not ideal, however, as the Church, which is the Body of Christ, we wish to stand together to fight this pandemic and preserve lives.

Yours sincerely in Christ the Good Shepherd

+ *Steve Lowe*

✠ Steve Lowe
BISHOP OF HAMILTON