



Pastoral Letter from Bishop Noel Treanor

Feast of St Patrick

17 March 2020

Solidarity in a Time of Crisis

My sisters and brothers,

The world-wide outbreak of the coronavirus reveals the fragility of human existence and the reality of suffering. This crisis reminds us that we all part of one global family.

As we face together the physical, psychological, spiritual, social and economic impact of this virus, it is a time to take assurance in the promise of God's presence. The Scriptures recount that in times of plague and human suffering, the promise of God's healing power and strength is present. That divine presence strengthens us in facing such situations with faith and hope.¹

I have no doubt that many of you are fearful and anxious as you reflect on the potential personal, familial and societal impact of the virus. You are worrying about your personal health and the welfare of loved ones. You realise the vulnerability of the young, the aged and those with underlying health conditions. As a society, and as brothers and sisters in Christ, we face these anxieties and fears together.

This is a time for us, the People of God to pray, recognizing the broken body of Christ in those who are suffering. This is a time for us to bring a message of hope and to care for those who are feeling isolated and distressed.

We hold in prayer our civic leaders as they face indefinable challenges at local, national and international level. They carry great responsibility and are entrusted with giving courageous direction in addressing the current health situation.

We hold in our prayers our scientists and health-care workers; doctors, pharmacists, nurses, all working in hospitals and health administration, hospital chaplains, counsellors, administrators and volunteers. I pay tribute to the heroic and inspirational work of those in the health service across Northern Ireland. As fellow citizens, we know that changes to current medical provision and to hospital chaplaincy services will be necessary. We also know, however, that such disruption in the short term will enable care to be directed to those most in need.

Ministering Together in a Time of Crisis

As these lines are prepared, I think also of the priests and deacons, religious sisters and brothers, and all who work in the services, agencies and outreach of the diocese. I am deeply conscious that we are now called to give faithful witness in difficult times, as we walk alongside the sick. I ask you to hold all of them in your prayers.

I ask you, my dear people, to care for your clergy and religious as they continue to serve you. Many of our clergy and religious are vulnerable themselves. As Bishop, I have the responsibility to be mindful for their welfare. Changes to the public Celebration of Mass, the sacraments, and pastoral care, alongside the many

¹ Deut. 31:6 "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified...for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

activities that take place in parishes are necessary to protect society from the transmission of illness. These measures are also necessary to safeguard the welfare of clergy and religious in these changing times.

These times call for extra-ordinary measures. St Paul urges us all in his Letter to the Ephesians, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, to bear with one another in love" (Eph 4:1-2). We will need to be patient with each other, and supportive of each other, as we struggle together to manage this ever-changing situation and to address emergent pastoral needs.

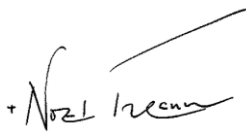
On this Feast of St Patrick, we are reminded of his prayer of protection. In his prayer, St Patrick assures a despondent Irish people of the ever-present God, especially in times of adversity.

Extract from Saint Patrick's Breastplate

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection,
implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided.
Inspired with this confidence,
I fly to you, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.
To you I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not my petitions, but in your mercy, hear and answer. Amen.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Noel Treanor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

+Noel Treanor

~~~ENDS~~~