

**Statement from Bishop Tom Deenihan, Bishop of Meath,
on the ringing of church bells on Saint Patrick's Day.**

The Diocese of Meath will join with other dioceses in ringing church bells in our parishes tomorrow, the Feast of Saint Patrick, at 11am.

Church bells call people to prayer, to pause, to mourn and to celebrate. While our Masses are now offered privately, though in many cases accessible through webcams and websites, the call to prayer is important. This is a time to pray and it has been heartening over the past few days to see people coming to our churches by themselves to offer silent prayers. We are not alone and the bells are a reminder of the presence of faith and prayer in these times.

It is a vital that we offer prayer for and with those in our communities who are worried, suffering or vulnerable. I think particularly of those in the health care sector who are heroically addressing the current crisis and those who must make difficult decisions. Let our bells also be a sign of solidarity with them.

The Feast of Saint Patrick calls us to reflect on what it means to be Christian and what it means to be Irish. As someone who was isolated and tested, Patrick has something to offer our time.

I am also conscious that many in our communities in recent days have reached beyond themselves and have reached out imaginatively and courageously to the elderly, the isolated and vulnerable in our communities. That is Christianity, that is what Patrick gave us, that is what we are.

The Church exists within society and, at this time, the Church must encourage its members to support the strategy of '*flattening the curve*'. Our actions over the coming days will have huge implications for the trajectory of this illness and how our hospitals cope. A basic tenet of Christianity is loving our neighbour as our self. While parish communities have made the sacrifice of suspending public Masses, let us make the additional but critical sacrifice these days in terms of frequent hand washing, social distancing, avoiding crowds and groups and the avoidance of handshaking. Our individual sacrifice may save others. We have an obligation to

each other and the common good.

These are difficult times. I offer my own prayers to those who are afflicted, worried, isolated and working to alleviate this crisis. I pray for the Doctors, nursing staff, health care workers, public officials and those in our communities who are working hard, amongst them our priests and religious, some of whom are aged themselves.

Through the intercession of Saint Patrick, our prayers and our own efforts, may we be spared the worst of this pandemic.

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