

Dear Parishioners of Greencastle and Broughderg,

Having just finished celebrating this morning's mass it is with a heavy heart and deep sadness that I have to share the following communications from our Bishop Donal McKeown.

As you can see from the letters attached below, effective immediately, in line with this weekend's announcement from the Executive all churches are to be closed. I will enact that in the next hour or so. The parish churches therefore will only be opened in the case of a funeral.

We are also asked to put a notice in place a notice to say that in line with the new regulations our three parish cemeteries are to be closed also. As soon as is practical I will have a sign erected to point this out.

I know this will mean a further Tsunami of sadness will sweep across our lives, however this is a painful but necessary course of action as is explained in the two letters below from Bishop Donal.

May God give us all the strength we need to carry us through these really difficult times.

Fr Eddie Gallagher PP

Dear Father

[On Saturday evening](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/Coronavirus-Restrictions-Regs-2020.pdf), new regulations were applied by the Department of Health: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/Coronavirus-Restrictions-Regs-2020.pdf>

These regulations include provisions which apply explicitly to churches.

In particular, during the time of the regulations, churches are to be closed, except:

- (a) for funerals;
- (b) to broadcast a Service by internet, radio or TV;
- (c) to provide certain additional civic services (food banks, support for homeless etc).

In addition, the regulations identify the 'reasonable excuses' a citizen may have to be outside his or her home at this time. The possibility of visiting a church, except for a funeral (with restrictions), is not one of the 'reasonable excuses'. In other words, even if the church were open, no one could lawfully come to it.

The result of these regulations is that you should close the church(es) in your parish immediately, even for individual parishioner visits. You can continue to provide Services, behind close doors, on the webcam and other internet means. Funerals can continue under the existing restrictions.

Clergy are permitted, under the regulations, to travel to their "place of worship".

There was no possibility of making comment on these regulations in advance, as they were made under 'emergency procedures', coming into being only one hour after they were laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly. Obviously, the Department's knowledge of how churches operate is limited. However, within the regulations, there is a review process, with the first review date being [18 April](#). It may be possible to ask the Department of Health to

review aspects of the regulations which might appear to have little impact on risk factors for infection.

I would ask that you put the regulations in place as soon as possible. As we have all learned in recent weeks, dealing with COVID 19 involves regular changes in what we may or may not do. As matters develop, I will be in contact.

Please note that, due to social distancing, Holy Communion should not be given at Funerals.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for the efforts, some very imaginative, that you are making to keep in contact with your parishioners, support them in this difficult time and maintain a sense of parish community.

I hope that you are all well.

Yours sincerely

+ Donal

Dear Father

I write to you about regulations from the Department of Health (NI), arising from COVID 19. The new regulations require that cemeteries in Northern Ireland are closed to members of the public, except for funerals and burials. I would ask that you put up a notice at your parish cemetery(ies), indicating that, in line with current COVID 19 government regulations, the cemetery is closed to visitors, except for funerals and burials.

Yours sincerely

+ Donal