

Despite the considerable restrictions, Church is very much alive

Bishop Leahy reaches out to First Holy Communion and Confirmation children as sacraments postponed

Sunday 19 April 2020: Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy has admitted the pain and sacrifice that the public has to endure due to the COVID-19 impact on Church services and sacraments, including now First Holy Communion and Confirmation, is difficult but stressed that ‘the Church is very much alive’ in these times.

In a statement read out after 12 midday Mass today at St. John’s Cathedral, Bishop Leahy said that the postponement now of First Holy Communion and Confirmations, on top of the many other restrictions with funerals, weddings, baptisms and other services, is, sadly, unavoidable to help curtail the spread of the virus at this critical time.

Bishop Leahy will write this week to children preparing for the sacraments to encourage them following the postponement of these special moments in their young lives and spoke today also of the support he has received from young people at this difficult time.

And he also said he was encouraged by the coming together in prayer that is happening with families across the diocese in a way they did not experience for years.

He said: “As we move towards the end of April, an increasing number of parents are understandably asking – ‘what’s going to happen to the First Communion and Confirmation ceremonies?’. Clearly because of where we are now in this critical stage of the battle against COVID-19, we can certainly say they are not going to happen in April or May. But, after that?

“Like all others, we must adhere to public authorities and what advice they give regarding large public gatherings. So, right now, it is impossible for us to re-schedule First Communion and Confirmation. And this is also true for Baptisms and Weddings.

“The postponement of the First Holy Communion and Confirmation will come as a disappointment to some. Though understandable given the Covid-19 crisis, it is a further sacrifice not least for the children.”

He continued: “I hope to write tomorrow to the children preparing for their First Communion and Confirmation to offer them words of encouragement. This week I got a lovely drawing of the Risen Jesus from eight-year old Carmel. I would invite girls and boys preparing for either First Communion or Confirmation, if they want, to send me in a drawing or write to me to let me know about what they are learning about

Jesus or the Holy Spirit. I would be very happy to receive such drawings and letters. Maybe you have a question for me. I can try to get back to you with an answer.

“I am grateful to our Diocesan Advisors who have put resources up on our Diocesan Website for the children preparing for First Communion and Confirmation. As well as thanking all school principals and teachers for continuing to keep such great contact with children, teaching on-line and providing resources, I want to thank the teachers of the children preparing for First Communion and Confirmation for keeping them in touch with the Grow in Love lessons. It is great that the Grow in Love on-line resources have also been made freely available for parents by Veritas on their website.”

Bishop Leahy said it is a “strange time for us all, not least because of the uncertainty at all levels”.

“It is indeed a topsy-turvy time. What can we say about all that’s going on for the Church? No Masses, churches closed, no Eucharistic Adoration, the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation postponed, and even pastoral visits to the sick and dying curtailed... All of this is painful. None of us have ever experienced anything like it. Though we understand why, nevertheless, some wonder what is it saying to us about the Church and our regular Church practices.

“I read recently about a humorous cartoon of God talking to the ‘enemy.’ The Devil is saying, ‘With COVID19 I have closed your churches’, and with God answering, ‘on the contrary, I have opened a church in each house. This is something to really reflect on. Churches may be closed and the celebration of sacraments postponed but the Church is not closed. It is very much alive.

“I have heard of whole families coming together, in a way they haven’t for years, to participate in Mass being transmitted on Television or online in one way or another. I have heard of people looking up online how to pray the Rosary as they want to do so with loved ones who are dying or in their homes or mortuaries alongside the deceased.

“Covid-19, strangely, is helping bring about a new recognition that the Church exists not only in church buildings or when we celebrate the sacraments, essential as these are in the overall, but it exists in every family. For the Church as a whole, this could be one of the great learning outcomes from Covid-19.

“Let’s think about it. We can pray as a family. Yes, we love our Church buildings but we don’t need them for prayer. Prayer can happen around a table or sitting together in a sitting room or privately on our own.”

He added that there are, of course, many other ways for the family to be Church, above all by loving one another. “So, Covid-19 is indeed an enemy. It has closed your church and postponed celebration of the sacraments. But, paradoxically, it is also prompting you to recognise in a new way that God has opened a church in your house.”