

## COVID 19: is your parish ready to go back into a higher level of alert?

By Joe Green

In early August 2020, the Ministry of Education shared with the education sector a one pager *Stamp it out: our plan to respond to new COVID-19 cases in the community*. It outlines the 'triggers' to move back to a higher level of alert, either regionally or nationally.



Some of the following questions might help you prepare:

- Do you know what the alert levels look like? The COVID-19 website has a simple explanatory.
- Is your current contact tracing up to standard? Do you have the QR code accessible at all your parish facilities? Do you remind people of the harm minimisation standards (stay at home if sick, wash hands regularly, cough into your elbow, have masks available – be open to wearing them in public places, and be prepared to contact the health line if unwell).
- Do you have hand sanitiser available as a routine? Washing facilities with hot water and soap?
- Do you have your parish roll up to date? With it accessible should we go straight to full lock down?
- If we move back to alert level 2: are you able to ensure physical distancing in your facilities? Are you able to ensure this is maintained both entering and leaving your facilities? Are you able to manage the cut off in numbers, at the same time ensuring that access to the liturgy isn't left only to the 'quick and the nimble'? This might mean Mass rosters, leaving some space for walk-ins.
- Are your liturgists and priests able to plan a liturgy under the guidelines put out by the Bishops' Conference? Things like only the presider processing, no singing, only one reader, only one person read the prayer of the faithful (and then from the lectern, not from among the people). Maintaining physical distancing, including between concelebrants?
- If we move to alert level 3 and 4: have you worked out how you will ensure contact with parishioners? Have you put in place mechanisms to provide support (for example by donating to a food bank, or setting up volunteers to a foodbank)? Have you thought of setting up small support groups? Will you offer prayer/reflections/meditation/Mass by social media? Have you set that up ready to go? If you don't offer this, do you have the links to tell parishioners where they can access these?
- Are you able to participate in zoom meetings?
- Have you catechised your parishioners so that, in the absence of a priest, they are able to pray with, pray for, bless, or console a loved one who is sick, or who might be dying?



### About Joe and a pandemic:

Joe in his time in the national police, was a coordinator for emergency management at police national headquarters from 2013 to 2016, with responsibility for the national and police pandemic plan, rewrite of the national civil defence plan, and underground mines response planning, and cruise ship emergency planning.