

Church Leaders encourage the community and call Ireland to pray

In a joint statement today (27 March), following a video conference, the leaders of the Church of Ireland, Methodist Church in Ireland, Roman Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Irish Council of Churches, have paid tribute to everyone in the health and social care services and those in the frontline, for their courage in the battle against the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The leaders of Ireland's main Churches, together with other denominations and Christian organisations, also issued a call to pray, which will take place on Palm Sunday, 5 April from 3pm-4pm.

Church Leaders' joint statement in full

"In these days when we can no longer gather and 'be church' in the traditional way, the call to live out the Gospel as agents of God's mercy and compassion through the sacrifices that we make to protect the vulnerable, and by finding new ways to be Good Samaritans and good neighbours is as powerful as ever.

"To all who are suffering, have lost loved ones and are anxious in these unprecedented days, we pray that you may find strength and comfort in the loving presence of Christ who promised to be with his people always (Matthew 28:20).

"As Church Leaders, we want to thank everyone in our health and social care services and those working on the frontline, for their courage as they work selflessly to minimise the suffering caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Alongside our chaplains and pastoral teams, they have chosen to walk towards the danger for our sake. We owe it to them to play our part in limiting the spread of this virus by staying home and practising social distancing when we need to go out.

"With this crisis has come a heightened awareness of our interconnectedness and interdependency and a new recognition of the vast array of jobs that are essential to the functioning of our society. All our workers, whether called into service at this time, or asked to stay home, need to be adequately protected.

"In the midst of this suffering, however we can see many signs of hope. The speed with which local communities, involving churches, community groups, charities, businesses and other local community leaders, who have mobilised in response to this unprecedented challenge, has been a great reassurance to many.

"We still have a long way to go in the fight against Covid-19 and its consequences. We will need many volunteers for our health service and to protect the vulnerable. Charities that provide much-needed support, also need donations, so please consider giving online. We are all called to make sacrifices, but the burden of suffering will not be evenly shared.

"In a short space of time the rhythm and pattern of our everyday lives has changed. There is however one constant throughout – an ever-loving God who tells us, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10.)

“As we look to Him with our pastoral and practical concerns during these unparalleled times, as the island battles this pandemic, standing alongside other denominations and Christian organisations, we are today issuing a call to pray.

“As Christians, we believe that prayer sustains our life as followers of Christ. In the midst of this global pandemic, we turn to Jesus in our time of need. As Church leaders, we join together in calling all our people to pray. As we begin the journey through Holy Week towards Good Friday and Easter, **we invite all Christians from across the whole Church to join in prayer on Palm Sunday, 5 April, from 3pm to 4pm** - remembering that we should only gather to pray within our own households, in line with government advice.

“God loves the world and everyone in it. We will pray for those who are sick, and those feeling fearful; we will pray for those who have been bereaved and those who are isolated and alone. We will pray for our healthcare professionals, delivery drivers, essential workers and all who continue to work on the frontline. We will pray for, and with those in our communities, who are fearful about their employment and for those reaching out to provide food and shelter. We will pray for our families and friends, neighbours and civic, business and political leaders for the inevitable challenges that will arise in the coming days. We also remember those across our world who are similarly suffering. We pray for those working hard to produce new treatments and vaccines.

“Though we cannot meet as the gathered Church, we will end the hour united in prayer, asking for the Lord’s healing touch on our land and all its people. All are invited to pray, regardless of where they are in their own journey of faith, even if they have never prayed before. At this critical moment we will bring this land and our world before our loving God in prayer remembering that, “We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy” (Daniel 9:18).”

Rt Rev Dr William Henry

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Rt Rev John McDowell

Church of Ireland Archbishop-elect of Armagh

Most Rev Eamon Martin

Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh & Primate of all Ireland

Rev Sam McGuffin

President of the Methodist Church in Ireland

Rev Brian Anderson

President of the Irish Council of Churches