**Statement regarding Celebrations of First Holy Communion & Confirmation**

All of us warmly welcome the return to public worship on Monday May 10announced last evening. It has been a long lockdown journey since St. Stephen’s Day last December and any return must be gentle and gradual and strictly adhere to the governments guidelines as advised by NPHET.

I know there is concern around celebrating the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation. The government guidelines about the return to public worship specifically advises that *‘other religious ceremonies such as Communions and Confirmations should not take place at this time.’*I know that this is disappointing news.

As you know I had already asked parishes not to plan to celebrate these sacraments in May this year. I am, however, aware that many parishes were hoping, and indeed planning, to offer dates for Confirmation and First Holy Communion to parents for the month of June, as soon as the return to public worship had been allowed. Given the latest advice from the government I am now asking that parishes do not proceed with planning for June and do not set any dates until further clarity is offered.

If you have already set dates please inform parents that these are, for now, suspended. I will keep you informed if the situation changes in the coming weeks but I believe that it is important that this information is communicated as soon as possible, while I am also aware that things can change at very short notice.

With regard to the celebration of Baptisms they are permissible, but always adhering to the guidelines - and for now celebrated only as a single family celebration (not multiple baptisms) with a maximum of six in attendance.

A reminder that there is absolutely no expiry date on sacraments. While our society is opening up the pandemic is still with us and we must remain vigilant. Let us do all we can to continue to encourage the preparation programmes and to keep the hearts up of the children and young people as they continue to await the sacraments.

+Denis