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Catholic bishops welcome Covid restrictions easing in time for Easter

The Catholic bishops of Aotearoa New Zealand are relieved that the use of vaccine passes is ending and restricted numbers of people allowed at Mass eased in time for Easter.

The Government announced today that the limit of 100 allowed with a vaccine pass at a religious gathering such as Mass will double to 200 from 11.59pm on Friday night. Masks must still be worn indoors, but people will no longer have to scan QR codes. Vaccine passes will not be required from 11.59pm on 4 April.

Until the latter date, the number of people allowed at a Mass without a vaccine-pass requirement remains at 25, according to the Government's Covid-19 website.

“It is really welcome that these restrictions are being eased in the middle of Lent and with Easter just over three weeks away,” said Bishop of Auckland Stephen Lowe, Secretary of the NZ Catholic Bishops Conference.

“While the bishops supported vaccine passes and similar restrictions when they were introduced last November, we said our support was based on the pandemic emergency as it was at the time,” said Bishop Lowe.

“We are well aware of the toll the emergency measures have taken, with many people experiencing serious and at times unforeseen hardships. With medical experts now telling us the omicron wave is peaking and starting to reduce in some places, it is good to see some of these restrictions coming to an end.

“However, this is not yet life as normal. We know that the virus will continue to have an impact on the way we celebrate in our churches for a while yet. We need to remain cautious and continue to wear masks and practise social distancing. And we will need to avoid certain ways of celebrating rituals that might make it easier for infections to spread.”

Good Friday is April 15, with Easter Sunday two days later. The Prime Minister said the Government would announce any changes to the Traffic Light system colour-setting on 4 April. At present, the whole country is in Red.

“I wish to express the bishops’ deep gratitude to the front-line workers and essential workers who have done so much to get our country through this pandemic so far, as well as to the Catholic Church’s own ministers and faithful for the sacrifices they willingly taken on for the sake of the most vulnerable people in society,” said Bishop Lowe.