

MEDIA RELEASE



Polding Centre
133 Liverpool Street
Sydney NSW 2000

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Petition calls on NSW Premier to end double standard

Catholics across NSW have been asked to sign a petition calling on Premier Gladys Berejiklian to grant places of worship equal treatment to other public spaces under eased COVID-19 restrictions that will be introduced on 1 June.

Under the new rules, up to 50 people will be allowed to gather at a club, restaurant or pub at the one time, but the rules have not been extended to churches where only a maximum of 10 people are currently allowed.

The petition, which can be signed at <https://www.openourchurches.com.au/>, asks the Premier why 50 people are allowed to dine in a restaurant, but only 10 people are allowed to attend Mass, even though churches are often much larger in size.

It also asks why people who attend a place of worship for a service or even private prayer are required to provide contact details, when this requirement is not placed upon those dining in cafes or attending shopping centres, or undertaking any other activity.

“Contrary to what has been said throughout this pandemic, we do not consider church attendance to be non-essential; indeed, nothing is more essential than the practice of our faith,” states the petition.

It is a sentiment strongly backed by the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP who said he believed a “double standard was being applied to people of faith”.

“We aren’t asking for special treatment, we are asking for equal treatment, which is why we are requesting the Premier to have a change of heart and include churches in the June 1 changes to the public health order allowing 50 people to come together for prayer or attend Mass”, Archbishop Fisher said.

“Currently the bus that stops outside my cathedral can have more people inside it than my cathedral can. It simply doesn’t make sense. People of faith have to already sign in to visit a church and provide contact details, which we are adhering to, but patrons to a café do not. Why is a place of worship being treated differently?”

Archbishop Fisher said he had written twice to the Premier, once jointly with all the Catholic Bishops of NSW about measures that could be taken to minimise risk while

relaxing restrictions around churches, but his calls for action from the government have been ignored.

“We have a ridiculous situation where a restaurant with a dimension of 200 square metres can now have 50 people for hours on end, while St Mary’s Cathedral, which is more than 10 times larger, is only allowed 10 people.

“As a Church leader, I must stand up for freedom of worship in our country when I see so many double standards being applied to people of faith.

“Churches have cooperated at every stage with the Government’s health directives during this pandemic, but our people are missing gathering for worship, praying in a sacred space and there are spiritual and mental health effects of such isolation.”

The petition can be signed at: <https://www.openourchurches.com.au>

For more information contact:

Michael Kenny

Manager of Catholic Communications & News Media

Archdiocese of Sydney

Mobile: 0438 046 406

Email: michael.kenny@sydneycatholic.org