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**STATEMENT FROM HIS EMINENCE MAR MEELIS ZAIA AM METROPOLITAN TO
THE FAITHFUL MEMBERS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA, NEW
ZEALAND AND LEBANON CONCERNING THE CORONAVIRUS**

Beloved members in Christ,
Blessings of the Lord be with you all,

As you are aware the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) is ever so growing, having reached certain areas throughout Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon. And so, as it has been made evident, the imperative need to follow all recommendations and directions received from the Australian Government and responsible health authorities in the state of NSW.

For this reason, after much deliberation from respective authorities and professionals, the Assyrian Church of the East Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon has decided to take the following actions for the benefit of the faithful:

1. The Mid-Lent Holy Mass (Wednesday 18th March) will be cancelled across all parishes.
2. The following Sundays' Holy Mass (Sunday 22 & Sunday 29 March) will be held at all parishes. However, upon arrival at each parish the committee members will direct the faithful as to the arrangements of the respective parish in partaking the Body and Blood of Christ.
3. The sermon that was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 18th March has been rescheduled to the following week, Wednesday 25th March at 7pm at St Hurmizd's Cathedral. Other weekly bible studies are on break until further notice.
4. In the event of a funeral, the clergy will fulfil the service according to the rites of the Assyrian Church of the East in its entirety. However, the wakes and gatherings in halls and receptions will NOT take place. Furthermore, we ask that the faithful refrain from shaking hands, greeting with kisses and any sort of physical contacts for the time being. Also, that gatherings in large numbers at homes is STRICTLY not recommended for the time being.
5. Similarly, as that of funerals, so also on the third day of the deceased the clergy will fulfil the services according to the rites of the Holy Church and the family is to return home with no arrangement of wake gathering of large number of people.
6. Morning and evening prayers will continue as per usual across all parishes. However, there is no need to kiss the cross upon entry into the church, also there is no need to exchange of peace greetings during the time of prayers. It is important to note once prayers have completed the faithful are to return to their homes and there will be no fellowship in the church, hall or its courtyard for the time being.
7. It is of paramount importance that all faithful are to fulfil utmost hygiene practices; i.e. washing hands with warm water and soap, use of antibacterial sanitizer and avoid physical contact with others when attending church services (or any other places for that matter).
8. For those individuals who feel unwell (fever, coughing, sneezing, headache, etc.), we ask that you refrain from partaking in any public forums, rather to seek medical attention immediately.

9. More information will be provided in the coming weeks regarding Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday services.

It is unfortunate humanity is facing such dire circumstances; however, it is important to be cautious. Mankind is deemed to always experience trials and tribulations, here the Lord teaches us to be as pure as a dove and as wise as a serpent (Matthew 10:16). And to put our faith and trust in God who is our protector and guide during these difficult times. The Holy Church has the health and well-being of its sons and daughters at the core of her concern.

In closing off, we ask that you continue to pray to the Lord that He may intervene and allow these difficult times to pass, especially during the coming weeks whereby Christians gather to commemorate and celebrate our Lord and Saviour's resurrection.

We pray for your health and well-being, and for those who are suffering, and may they be granted a speedy recovery and healing.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a small cross symbol followed by a stylized, cursive name.

Mar Meelis Zaia AM
Archbishop of Australia, New Zealand & Lebanon