

## **Message from the Diocesan COVID-19 Working Group**

Dear All

Yet again we apologise for the amount of material that you are having to go through in order to reopen your church and publicly celebrate Mass and the other sacraments. In addition to the Guidance from the Bishops' Conference that has already been circulated, we have also recently received the Government Guidance for the safe use of places of worship from 4 July. This should be read alongside the Bishops' Conference Guidance in relation to reopening churches for individual prayer, celebrating Mass and Confession. You will also have seen the Guidance in relation to funerals and Guidance in relation to Baptisms is expected later this week. All of this guidance is cumulative and needs to be read together.

The Government Guidance is available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july>

As you will see, risk assessments are necessary for the reopening of churches and having public worship. We are adopting the approach of a diocesan-wide risk assessment with checklists at parish level to confirm that the risks have been assessed and the necessary steps and precautions have been, and will continue to be, taken and observed.

Thank you to everyone who has already completed the checklist to enable your church to be reopened for private prayer. A checklist needs to be completed in relation to every church or other building that is to be reopened. This is not negotiable and there could be serious repercussions both for you, and the Trustees of the Diocese, if a checklist is not completed and reviewed by our Health & Safety Team or advisors. For Mass to be celebrated both the reopening checklist and the addendum for celebrating Mass must be completed. In order that we can advise you that Mass can be celebrated, if you wish to celebrate Mass on 4/5 July the reopening checklist must be submitted by 12 noon on Wednesday 1 July (if you have not already done this) and the addendum by 10am on Thursday 2 July. To celebrate Mass at the weekend you will need to have received confirmation that everything is in order either by e mail or Secure Approval on the SafetyToolbox website.

We set out below a few important points, but this is no substitute for reading both the Bishops' Conference and Government Guidance:

1. **Before any church re-opens the parish priest must have returned the duly completed checklists** to [hs@dioceseofbrentwood.org](mailto:hs@dioceseofbrentwood.org) to demonstrate that the requirements have been met. This is not optional. Please also wait to receive confirmation that all the requirements have been satisfied. It is possible to access and download the checklist on SafetyToolbox (in the COVID-19 Resources section) or, preferably, to complete it as an online Questionnaire using the COVID-19 Reopening Premises task found within the 'Task' list allocated to your particular church. Using the online questionnaire would make everything simpler and would speed up the process as it will automatically flag up sub-tasks or issues of concern. There will also be a further 'Secure Approval' for 'Resuming Communal Worship' which will indicate that all the requirements have been satisfied.

Both the Reopening Premises Checklist and the Addendum are **attached if you cannot access them online** and are unable to use the online questionnaire.

2. The guidance in relation to individual prayer must be in place and it is necessary to signpost the maximum safe operating capacity of the church, based on social distancing guidelines, at the door and the number and position within the church of people attending at any one time should be overseen by stewards.

3. Where possible the 2 metre social distancing requirements should be applied. It is possible to go to '1 metre with risk mitigation' where, and only where, '2 metres is not viable'. For a church, if people are to be spaced more closely than 2 metres apart, there would need to be the compulsory wearing of face coverings.

4. In preparing everything for the celebration of Mass, single-use gloves should be worn. A separate covered ciborium should be prepared for each minister of communion. The priest should prepare his own chalice and paten, cruets and lavabo. All paper material which is not single use should be removed from the church, the Holy Water stoups should be empty and there is, at present, to be no congregational singing. Readers should be supplied with single-use gloves, there should be no Prayer of the Faithful, offertory procession, shared collection plates or sign of peace.

5. There are two options for the distribution of communion. Please read these carefully and decide which of these is most appropriate for your circumstances.

6. Please note the guidelines in relation to the counting of money. People should be encouraged to make donations online or by standing order.

Social distancing is still at the heart of these guidelines. as well as cleaning between services and good hygiene – alcohol hand gel should continue to be provided for those entering and leaving the church. Toilet facilities should continue to remain closed. If they need to be used by Stewards or in an emergency or on request a proper cleaning regime and appropriate hygiene signage needs to be put in place. Masses should not be scheduled back to back to allow adequate cleaning to take place between services.

This guidance only applies to churches, not halls. We are still awaiting guidance about the use of halls and Mass should not be live-streamed into halls. Holy Communion can be distributed in churches, or outside where Mass is celebrated outside, but not in halls as the social distancing requirements cannot be met.

It is still necessary to complete a returning to work checklist for all employees (including those who have not been furloughed) to ensure they are aware of the procedures we are adopting in all our workplaces and to ensure they are working in a manner that is safe for them.

For volunteers there are revised briefing sheets available on SafetyToolbox which should be gone through with each volunteer so that they are aware of the things they need to do differently during Covid-19. They should also be given a copy of the briefing sheet as a reminder. Any questions related to HR should be directed to Anne-Marie Stokkerei.

Mass outside is permitted but a risk assessment should be carried out. If you are proposing to use school premises (outside) both the Diocesan and School Insurers will need to be notified and confirm that this is acceptable. Again, a risk assessment will need to be completed. We would imagine that the School Governors would wish to see this.

You will note the strong advice that the names of those attending Mass should be recorded for the purpose of the 'Test and Trace' system. We expect further guidance in relation to this later in the week.

There have been a number of requests about using parish halls for overflow at Masses. This is not liturgically appropriate, as people would not be actually present at Mass (even if they receive Holy Communion).

We continue to review the current guidance at diocesan level through our Covid-19 Working Group and the group is working tirelessly to ensure that the health and safety of ourselves, our parishioners, our employees and our volunteers are paramount in everything that we do. If you have any questions, please contact us via [healthandsafety@dioceseofbrentwood.org](mailto:healthandsafety@dioceseofbrentwood.org). The members of the group are Msgr Kevin Hale, Mgr Chris Brooks, Anne-Marie Stokkerei, Amanda Balicki, Simon Moules and Michael L'Estrange who are all available to help you as much as possible.

Thank you to everyone for their support.

The Covid-19 Working Group  
30 June 2020