



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

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From the President — Cardinal Vincent Nichols

29th June 2020

To the Members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

By Email

Dear Father,

I am pleased to attach to this Note the full Guidance published this morning by HM Government on the use of Places of Worship from 4th July 2020 in England.

I wish to point out the following key points to which we must give heed:

1. Risk Assessment.

The advice is clear that a risk assessment must be carried out before a church can be brought back into use. Failure to complete an adequate risk assessment could constitute a breach of regulations.

2. Numbers and Social Distancing.

- a. The guidance is clear that 30 people is the maximum for Funerals Services and Weddings, and Baptisms as ceremonies outside the normal pattern of parish worship.
- b. The guidance is clear that a calculation of numbers to be admitted to a church needs to be made carefully with a number of factors in mind, especially social distancing and potential pinch points (access and egress).
- c. Social distancing means 2 metres or "1 metre with risk mitigation." 1 metre without additional measures is not an option offered in the guidance. It clearly recommends using "1 metre with risk mitigations" only "where 2 metres is not viable."

3. Singing.

The Guidance stresses that singing is to be 'specifically avoided.' If a cantor is to be used, then it recommends a Perspex screen be placed between the singer and the congregation in addition to social distancing, which should be increased.

4. Distribution of Holy Communion.

The Guidance has quite specific statements about this under the heading of 'Food and Drink.' Please give this particular attention. The guidance is explicit that Communion is to be given hand to hand only and that social distancing is to be maintained with people moving within the space.

5. Duration of Service

The Guidance is clear in its use of phrases such as 'the shortest possible time' and 'minimising time spent in contact' as important factors in reducing risk.

6. Test and Trace

The Guidance seeks cooperation in the 'Test and Trace' system by our keeping a record of those attending a church at any one time. The Guidance states that it will explore with us ways that are 'manageable' and mentions the pre-booking systems of regulating those who come to church. One way that this cooperation could be achieved is with a system of pre-completed cards giving the names of those attending public worship and a contact number, to be placed in a bag/box on entry and then retained securely for 21 days. This will be a point for further discussion with the Task Force at the next meeting on Thursday of this week.

I hope you find these 'highlights' helpful. Please do ensure that in our practice we are following this advice, which comes with the full backing of the Office of the Chief Medical Officer.

With all good wishes and prayers,

Cardinal Vincent Nichols.

President

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales