

DIOCESE OF PORTSMOUTH: RE-OPENING GUIDELINES

(approved 2nd July 2020)

This week the government issued new guidelines for the re-opening of Churches for public worship and 'life-cycle' events (which include, among others, Baptisms, Weddings, and Funerals) from Saturday 4th July 2020. Below are general guidelines for re-opening Churches for Mass and other liturgies. Separate fact sheets will also be issued summarising each area. While these are general guidelines, the government recommends that priests open their Churches when they determine it is safe to do so. We encourage parish priests to re-open at the pace that is right for local circumstances and for them, mindful that some of our clergy are in the category designated 'at risk'. We are grateful for the understanding of our parishioners and for their support at this time.

1. Reading the Government Guidelines

The government guidelines make different use of the words 'must' and 'should':

'Must' Where the guidelines use the word **'must'** they refer to a **legal obligation**: not following these provisions breaks the law and makes us liable to sanctions.

'Should' Where the guidelines use the word **'should'** they are **strongly advising a particular course of action**, but there is no legal obligation to do so. Where we can make a risk assessment and mitigate the risks it is left to our judgment to adapt the advice to our circumstances.

These Diocesan guidelines are here to provide a simple checklist of our obligations under the regulations and the new government guidelines and apply our judgment to those areas which require interpretation.

2. Preparing the Church to re-open for Mass

The government have allowed Churches to re-open for Mass from Saturday 4th July. In preparation for re-opening, a number of steps will need to be taken by the Parish priest and volunteer organisers:

Must:



Carry out a full risk-assessment and decide what appropriate safety measures need to be made in order to ensure the safety of staff, volunteers, and those attending Mass. Where possible, this should be published online.

Should:



Measure the safe capacity of the Church: measure out seats for members of the same household with 2m (minimum 1m where risk-mitigation steps are possible¹) between each seat. Count the number of available seats you have marked and do not allow any more than this number to enter the Church at any one time.



Clearly mark seats and closed rows to maintain the 1m+ minimum distance between people. Clearly mark which seats/rows are open, and which rows are closed with tape and printed signs.



Mark and signpost a one-way system to manage the flow of people around the church and maintain social distancing.

¹ 'Risk Mitigation' refers to all of the steps in the 'should' column, but particularly hand sanitising upon entrance, wearing a mask/face covering, and a one-way system.



Have a **clearly marked entrance and exit** from the church: ideally these would be different doors. If this is not possible, ensure those waiting to enter stop at least 2m from the door and wait for stewards to usher them in/out. If this is the case, mark the line.



Appoint Stewards to manage the flow of people into and out of the Church before and after Mass, and to guide people to seats to ensure social distancing is maintained.



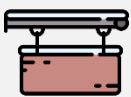
Remove all hymn books, as well as Mass cards, missalettes, and other shared materials from the church.



Place **hand sanitiser at the entrance and exit** and within reach of the priest. Hands should be sanitised upon entering and leaving the Church.



Place a receptacle (basket, safe, tin etc.) for collections in a visible place for those who wish to make cash donations. Do not pass around a collection plate. Encourage online donations instead of cash as far as possible. Keep cash donations in sealed bags for 48 hours before opening.



Put up clear signs around the church and in the pews with directions for the people to follow (a signage pack has been put together and will be sent out with the summary factsheets)



Consider a **booking system for Mass** and encourage people to go to weekday Masses when they are unable to book a place on Sunday.



If it is manageable, and if a booking system is not in place, parishes should **keep a register** of the people attending each Mass, along with contact details for each person, which should be kept for 21 days to aid with NHS Test and Trace.

3. Guidelines for Mass

The government have allowed churches to re-open for Mass from Saturday 4th July, in preparation for re-opening, a number of steps will need to be taken by the parish priest and volunteer organisers:

Must:



Avoid physical contact between members of different households: do not offer the sign of peace and do not greet parishioners at the door before or after Mass.



The people must not self-communicate (take communion from the paten/ciborium themselves). Instead the priest (with sanitised hands) should distribute communion in the normal way, taking care to avoid physical contact.

Should:



Do not have an offertory procession: the gifts should be placed on the credence table and prepared by the priest at the altar.



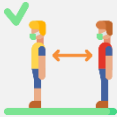
Place the Missal on the Altar or a Lectern so a server is not needed to hold it



The priest should **wash his own hands** at the Lavabo and sanitise his hands before and after distributing communion. The **ciborium with the people's hosts should remain covered** (either with a pall or it's lid) during the Eucharistic prayer.



Only the priest should distribute communion at Mass. This is (1) to minimise the number of people handling the sacred species and (2) so that the procession for communion stays in single file.



The people should **stand in a single file line** for communion and be reminded to maintain social distancing in the line: at least 1m between people (ideally 2m). They should follow the one-way system to and from their seats.



Only the priest should consume the celebrant's host and receive from the chalice. Otherwise, Holy Communion is to be distributed **under one kind** only.



Neither the priest nor the people should wear gloves for Mass, especially during communion.



The people should be strongly **encouraged to receive communion** in the hand. Those wishing to receive communion on the tongue should be encouraged to: (1) wait until last to receive communion, (2) kneel and open their mouth wide to receive so that physical contact can be avoided.



The reader(s) should be instructed to **avoid touching the ambo or the Lectionary**. In this instance gloves may be appropriate to avoid contaminating the Lectionary.



The use of **wind or brass instruments** (any instrument which requires the musician to blow into it) **should be avoided**. 'Safe' instruments include the organ, piano, or other stringed instruments.



Singing by choirs and the people should be avoided. If there is any singing, it is best by a single cantor at a safe distance from others in the congregation.



The people should wear a **facemask or other covering** during Mass (except to receive Holy Communion). This minimises the risk to others if they are infected. **The priest should not wear a mask** except when distributing Communion.



Thoroughly clean the Church between Masses: clean the Church (especially the pews) between Masses to avoid spreading illness between congregations.

FAQ:



Can deacons assist at Mass? Yes. A deacon may be present to read the Gospel, but should not assist with preparing the gifts, and social distancing on the sanctuary and in the sacristy must be maintained; so he should not sit beside the priest and should vest in a separate place. His alb and dalmatic should be kept separately and 'quarantined' for 48 hours after use.



Can servers assist at Mass?

Generally No. It would be best to avoid using altar servers so that as few people as possible are on the sanctuary. However, if you are unable to celebrate Mass without the assistance of a server, then *one* altar server may be permitted to assist. Again, social distancing must be maintained. Albs or cassocks and cottas must be 'quarantined' for 48 hours after each use.

4. Baptisms, Weddings, and Funerals in Church

In addition to the general re-openings for Mass, the government has also allowed Churches to host Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, and other 'life cycle events' (which would include Confirmations and First Holy Communions). These are subject to the normal rules (above) and to some additional restrictions.

Should:



Restrict the number of attendees. The government recommends that for Weddings and Funerals, there should be no more than 30 people in total in attendance. For other events (e.g. Baptisms) this limit is also advised unless it takes place during normal public worship (i.e. in the context of a regularly scheduled Mass).



Avoid full immersion baptism; use small amounts of water during baptisms so that it doesn't splash onto others around the person being baptised. Others present should stand further away to avoid this.



Use a cotton-bud when applying sacramental oils. Burn the cotton bud after use.



Do not allow parties or receptions (especially with food or drink) to take place on Church property: these events are heavily discouraged by the government, and given the difficulty maintaining social distancing, *may* break the law.

FAQ:



Can we celebrate Requiem Masses and Nuptial Masses? Yes. It is permitted to celebrate the Requiem/Funeral Mass and Nuptial in Church provided that the normal protocols for Mass and those above for Weddings and Funerals are followed.

5. Communications

The following should be taken into account when communicating these changed circumstances to the people:



Those who are especially vulnerable should be advised to stay at home: those who are over 70, in the 'shielding group', or at especially high risk of infection should be advised to follow government shielding guidelines and stay at home.



Advise people about your **booking system** for Mass (if you have one in place) **and about the capacity limits**; remind people that the Sunday obligation has yet to be restored and suggest they attend a weekday Mass instead of Sunday.



Continue live streaming (if you are already doing so) or consider starting a live stream so that those unable to participate in person can do so virtually.



Publish a clear timetable of all your Mass times, so that people know when Mass will be available for them.



Ask for volunteers, to serve as stewards and church cleaners, and as helpers to run the live stream. Remind the people that without active volunteers there can be no public Mass.



Before the start of Mass, **remind people about the relevant guidelines** again to ensure full co-operation.