



# GUIDANCE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MASS DURING THE COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC DIOCESE OF LEEDS

REVISED 12 JANUARY 2021

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 4th January 2021, the Prime Minister announced a further National Lockdown, which commenced on 5<sup>th</sup> January. During this period of lockdown places of worship will once more be allowed to remain open for individual prayer and collective acts of worship. Under the Government's current restrictions, attending a church for Mass or private prayer is one of the very few specific purposes with legal exemptions for which people are allowed to leave their home. It is therefore crucial that we and those attending comply with the law and the COVID-19 guidance.
- 1.2 The following guidance, issued by the Diocese of Leeds, incorporates the directives for the celebration of Mass drafted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in consultation with the Government's Office of the Chief Medical Officer; it also complies with the **Government's COVID 19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship (11<sup>th</sup> January 2021)**.

## 2. Authorisation to Re-open a Church and Capacity Number for Attendance

- 2.1 The guidance assumes that before a church re-opens for the celebration of Mass, the established requirements for churches to re-open for individual private prayer are in place and that the re-opening of a church has been authorized by the Dean or his representative (see *Ad clerum* 12<sup>th</sup> June 2020).
- 2.2 The Government's guidance is clear, that a risk assessment must be carried out before a church can be used for private prayer or public communal worship during the pandemic. Failure to complete and implement an effective a risk assessment that accounts for COVID-19 could constitute a breach of Health & Safety legislation and could also lead to a breach of The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 4) Regulations 2020. Compliance with the procedure requiring authorisation from the Dean will ensure that a Parish has: determined a maximum capacity number for each church with a number of factors in mind, especially social distancing and potential pinch points (access and egress); that the seating and movement within the church of those people attending is overseen by volunteer stewards; and, that the arrangements are in place for churches to be cleaned after use.

## 3. Face Coverings

- 3.1 Currently, it is mandatory to wear face coverings in Places of Worship. All those who are attending churches must wear a face covering unless they are exempt from doing so. This is for the good of all who gather in the church as it is an enclosed public space where there

are people from differing households<sup>1</sup> or support bubbles<sup>2</sup> who do not normally meet.<sup>3</sup>

3.2 Priests in the sanctuary, providing they are sufficiently distant (2m or more) from the congregation, do not need to wear a face covering except when distributing Holy Communion (please see below). Other ministers in the sanctuary should wear face coverings and remain socially distant from the celebrant.

#### **4. Social Distancing and the Limitation on Numbers Attending Mass**

4.1 The Government maintains that the 2m social distancing requirements should be applied wherever possible. The Government has said it is possible to go to “1m plus;” this means you can space people more closely (with a minimum of 1m) providing a mitigation of risk is also applied. Whilst it is compulsory for members of the congregation to wear a face covering, a parish priest may decide to increase the capacity of their church by moving the seating arrangements to 1m plus where this is desirable and possible. This may be more desirable in some smaller churches.

4.2 Wherever possible, worshippers should limit their interactions with, and maintain social distancing from, anyone outside of the ‘household’ or ‘support bubble’ with whom they are attending corporate worship.

4.3 Social distancing requirements significantly reduce the seating capacity of our churches. It is for this reason that the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains suspended. Consequently, those wishing to attend Mass should consider the possibility of doing so on a weekday. For example, someone who is retired or not in full-time employment may be able to attend Mass easily during the week; this would enable the Masses which are celebrated at the weekend to have more room available for those who are only free to attend on a Saturday evening or on a Sunday. Such a willingness to be flexible would ease the pressure on numbers attending weekend celebrations and allow a gradual return to attendance at Mass for more people.

#### **5. Managing Church Access**

##### ***5.1 Registration of Intention to Attend a Scheduled Celebration of Mass***

To facilitate the safe use of our churches, we are asking everyone who would like to be present at Mass on Saturday evening or Sunday to register their name for the scheduled celebration of Mass which they wish to attend in a specific church. This registration can be done either on-line or by telephone.

##### ***5.2 Online Registration Service***

An Online Registration Service for managing church access will be available to parishes to incorporate into their parish website via a link. If he decides to do so, a parish priest will

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<sup>1</sup> A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation.

<sup>2</sup> A support bubble is an exclusive close support network between two households. It means you can have close contact with that household as if they were members of your own. From 2nd December, you can form a support bubble with another household, if at least one has:

- only one adult; (including a household where any children are under the age of 18)
- only one adult carer (i.e., living with any additional adult(s) in the household that have a disability and require continuous care)
- a child under 1 (regardless of how many other adults are in the household); or
- a child under 5 with a disability that requires continuous care (regardless of how many other adults are in the household)

<sup>3</sup> Clergy and faithful should also wear face coverings in all other enclosed public spaces on church premises where social distancing may be difficult, and they come into contact with people they do not normally meet.

be able to reserve a percentage of places (to be determined by him) from the total capacity of his church for registrations to be made via the telephone by people who do not have access to the online booking service. If a parish priest chooses not to use the online registration service, then arrangements should be made to enable parishioners to telephone the parish clergy (or parish office, if this is staffed for advertised periods) to request that a place be registered for them for a specific scheduled Mass.

### ***5.3 Individual and Household Registration***

Parishioners will be able to register for their own attendance and, where applicable, include the number of people who will attend with them from their household if sufficient capacity remains available at the time of registration. When the church capacity for a scheduled Mass is reached, it will not be possible to make any further registrations for that specific scheduled Mass.

### ***5.4 Contact Details***

The online booking service will require only the registration of a parishioner's name and email address. For telephone registration, the parishioner's name and contact telephone number will be required only. This will enable us to observe the government guidance which ask that we keep a record for 21 days of the names and contact details of those who visit our churches; it will assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if it is needed for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks.

In the event that a person, having attended church, is subsequently tested positive for COVID 19, it is not the responsibility of the church to inform others that might have come in contact with that person, during their visit to the church. This would be the responsibility of the local government. However, under the Health and Safety at Work Act, the church does have a duty of care to its employees and volunteers who might have come into contact with that person. Stewards and cleaners will fall under this category, therefore, should it become known that a visitor to the church has been tested positive then employees and volunteers who might have come into contact with that person should be informed as soon as reasonably possible.

Where parishes are registered using the NHS COVID-19 app and displaying a registered QR Code at the entrance to their church premises, although this means the contact details of those registering their presence with the app need not be collected by the Church, manual or electronic booking systems should still be used in order to ensure that the capacity of the building is respected and to help protect people with the test and trace service.

### ***5.5 Weekday Masses***

It may not be necessary for parishioners to register for attendance at weekday Masses in every church; this is something that only the parish priest can decide on the basis of his knowledge of his parish. However, a parish priest may decide to require this should he be concerned that the numbers which may attend could exceed the safe capacity of the church and result in the ability of parishioners to observe socially distancing being placed at risk.

### ***5.6 Publication of Arrangements***

We wish to ensure, as far as possible, that no one comes to one of our churches and is unable to be admitted because of the social distancing requirements. Even though some people may not be able to attend Mass as often as they would like, we want everyone to feel welcome and to have the opportunity to gather before the altar of the Lord. Parishioners

should be informed by their parish clergy about the specific arrangements being made for the churches within their parish which are able to be re- opened for the celebration of Mass. A revised 'Frequently Asked Questions' document (see attached) which has been prepared for use in the Diocese can be used in conjunction with the information that a priest makes available to his parishioners.

## 6. Advice to Clergy

- 6.1 Priests and deacons should remain mindful of their own personal health and well- being with respect to potential exposure to the transmission of the COVID-19 virus.
- 6.2 It is permissible for those in the 70+ age group, and those who are vulnerable to infection, to celebrate or exercise their ministry at Mass, but it is strongly advised that they do not distribute Holy Communion, and they take particular care to maintain a safe physical distance from the congregation. They should return to the sacristy directly after Mass is ended.

## 7. Celebration of Mass within Church Buildings

### 7.1 *Before the Mass*

No one should be in the sacristy before Mass except those who need to be there. The celebrant, sacristan, or server(s) should prepare everything for the celebration of Mass with care. Single-use gloves should be worn at this stage. Particular care should be taken over the preparation of the elements for Holy Communion. The altar breads for distribution to the people should be placed into a clean ciborium or dish paten; these should be covered with a pall which can be pulled back very slightly during the Eucharistic Prayer so that the vessels are not entirely covered for the Words of Institution. Sufficient altar breads for each celebration should be placed within them at this stage. A separate ciborium/paten should be prepared for each person who will distribute Holy Communion. Holy Communion should be distributed under one kind only. Whilst the risk of infection during the current pandemic remains, Holy Communion from the chalice must not be offered to the lay faithful. The practice of intinction is not to be introduced as an alternative.

The cover of the ciborium or dish paten should not be removed until the time for distribution of Holy Communion. The priest should prepare his own chalice and paten with a large altar bread for consecration. The chalice should have a purificator and a pall. The purificator should be used only once and then laundered. He should prepare the cruets of wine and water and his own bowl for the lavabo. Again, the towel should be used only once and then laundered. All hymnbooks, missals and other published material normally used by the congregation which is not meant for single use should be removed from the church. The Holy Water stoups should be dry.

### 7.2 *Singing, Choirs and Music*

The cumulative effect of aerosol exhalation from singing creates a higher risk of COVID-19 transmission. Consequently, until further instruction is given, there should be no congregational singing at Mass. Under the current Government guidance, **it is permissible for one professional singer to sing during Mass**. However, this must be done in such a way that individual is appropriately socially distanced from others in the church, and in accordance with the safe capacity of the church.

It is permitted for an organist to play during Mass.

### **7.3 Sacred Ministers and Servers during the Mass**

The priest, and if present, deacon and server(s), should remain socially distant at all times whilst on the sanctuary during the celebration of Mass. This is particularly important at the Gospel (for the deacon's blessing), the Preparation of the Gifts, and during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Servers must wear face coverings whilst in the Sanctuary.

The deacon should wear a face covering during the Mass apart from the proclamation of the Gospel when, providing the lectern is sufficiently distant from the congregation, he should remove his face covering and replace it immediately after proclaiming the Gospel unless he is also preaching the homily and/or leading the Prayer of the Faithful.

### **7.4 Liturgy of the Word**

Readers should sanitise their hands before and after reading or be supplied with single-use gloves and should avoid touching the microphones or the Lectionary during the Liturgy of the Word, apart from page turning. Providing the lectern is sufficiently distant from the congregation, readers may remove their face coverings at the lectern to read but should replace them before stepping away from it. The homily should be brief, to minimise the time that people are congregated in the church building. The Prayer of the Faithful may be omitted.

### **7.5 Offertory and Preparation of the Gifts**

There should be no offertory procession of the gifts of bread and wine to the altar; the priest should prepare these on the credence table or the altar before Mass begins. Collection plates or bags should not be handed to congregants to pass on. People should continue to be encouraged to make their donation to the church online or via standing order.

Plates or other collecting boxes for cash offerings should be placed at the entrances and exits of churches, and this should be overseen by stewards. The collection should be consolidated into plastic bags, sealed, placed into a secure location and left for 72 hours before counting. Counters should wear gloves when doing this task and the area should be well ventilated and cleaned before and afterwards.

### **7.6 The Communion Rite**

The Sign of Peace should not be exchanged at Mass. Clergy should therefore omit the invitation to offer the sign of peace, prior to the *Agnus Dei*.

After the priest has said, "Behold the Lamb of God ... Lord I am not worthy", he should hold up the Host to the Congregation and say audibly "The Body of Christ" to which the people should respond "Amen." In the same way, he elevates the chalice and says, "The Blood of Christ" and again the people respond "Amen." The priest should then receive Holy Communion under both kinds using his own Host and Chalice. The priest will need to explain this to the congregation at this point.

There are options for the distribution of Holy Communion. All present at the Mass will have already acclaimed the presence of the Lord, at the priest's Communion, so Holy Communion is distributed in silence with no dialogue between minister and communicant. The priest, and those who are distributing Holy Communion should wear face coverings when doing so. Unless the communicant is unable to stand without difficulty, all those who wish to receive Holy Communion should do so standing. The objectives are to seek to maximise distance between minister and communicant and where possible to minimise movement. The options for the distribution of Holy Communion are:

### **Option 1**

Once the priest has received Holy Communion, he should put on his face covering and cleanse his hands with alcohol sanitiser before opening the pre-prepared ciborium for the Communion of the people. If there is a deacon assisting, or an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, they should similarly put on their face coverings and cleanse their hands with hand sanitiser. They then receive Holy Communion administered by the priest from the people's ciborium, and under one kind only. They should then cleanse their hands again before receiving their ciborium from which they remove the pall if it is still in place.

At the place where communion is to be distributed, the position where the communicant should stand can be signed by floor markings, or tape, or by a physical object such as a prie-dieu (kneeler on the priest's side) or small table to socially distance the priest distributing Holy Communion from communicants. Communion must be given silently in the hand only, with the communicant standing, and avoiding any physical contact. People should wait in their pews until instructed to move forward to the priest for Holy Communion by the Stewards, always aware of the regulations on social distancing in the orderly queue. **Only when the communicant is approaching the priest, should they unloop their face covering** and with arms at 'full stretch' extend their hands as flatly as possible, palms upwards, one of top of the other, to receive Holy Communion. They should then immediately consume the Sacred Host and replace their face covering before moving back to their seats in an orderly manner.

When distribution of Holy Communion is completed, the priest returns to the altar and places the unused Hosts, without touching them, into the Tabernacle. The priest can then remove his face covering before and cleanse the sacred vessels himself in the usual way.

### **Option 2**

The priest receives Holy Communion as described and immediately cleanses his paten and chalice. He then holds a reverent silence before the Prayer after Communion, giving the Blessing and dismissal. At this point, the priest puts on his face covering, cleanses his hands with hand sanitiser and the other Ministers of Holy Communion who will assist the priest come forward, cleanse their hands with hand sanitiser and receive Holy Communion under one kind. They should then put on their face coverings and cleanse their hands with hand sanitiser again before receiving their ciborium from which they remove the covering or pall if it is still in place. They then move to the points for distribution and communicants are stewarded forward in an orderly manner to receive Holy Communion as above, and then immediately exit the church building. The remaining Blessed Sacrament is placed into the Tabernacle, the priest then can remove his face covering before the vessels are cleansed in the usual way.

### **Option 3**

Where the objectives to seek to maximise distance between minister and communicant and where possible to minimise movement can be maintained, the minister(s) may distribute Holy Communion by going to the congregation and moving between the communicants. This is done as follows: once the priest has received Holy Communion, he should put on his face covering and cleanse his hands with alcohol sanitiser before opening the pre-prepared ciborium for the Communion of the people. If there is a deacon assisting, or an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, they should

similarly put on their face coverings and cleanse their hands with hand sanitiser. They then receive Holy Communion administered by the priest from the people's ciborium, and under one kind only. They should then cleanse their hands again before receiving their ciborium from which they remove the pall if it is still in place. Holy Communion is then taken to the communicants in their places.

Unless the communicant is unable to stand without difficulty, all those who wish to receive Holy Communion should do so standing at the place of their seat in the church.

**Where the layout of the church and seating permits, Option 3 would be the preferred Option, as it reduces the need for movement of the congregation within the church.**

Those who normally come for a blessing at the time of Holy Communion rather than receiving Communion, may be invited to fold their arm(s) diagonally across their chest. The priest or deacon should then make the sign of the cross over them but without saying any words of blessing.

## **8. After the Celebration of Mass**

- 8.1 The procession from the sanctuary at the end of the Mass should ensure good social distancing. The sanctuary party should return to the sacristy after Mass. If the clergy wish to greet the people, they should remove their vestments first put on a face covering (if in church) and avoid any physical contact with parishioners. **Parishioners should be encouraged to disperse quickly and not to remain and socialise within or outside the doors of the church building.**
- 8.2 Any worship aids (missalettes etc.) should be for single use and the user instructed to take them away when the celebration of the Mass is concluded; they should not be left in the church at the end of Mass.
- 8.3 The celebrant should place the used altar linens into a receptacle for laundry. All sacred vessels should be washed in hot water with a little neutral soap and dried completely before storing. Any discarded printed materials should be removed and bagged for disposal.
- 8.4 The church should be closed after the Mass has finished in order to clean the space according to the guidelines. If there is cause for concern regarding the possible contamination of clerical vestments worn during the celebration of Mass, these should be washed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, using the warmest water setting allowed for the fabric and allowing time for them to dry completely.

## **9. Hygiene and Toilet Facilities**

- 9.1 On entering and leaving the church, everyone should be asked to use the hand sanitiser product provided at the entrance and exits of the church.
- 9.2 Any toilet facilities in the church should be made available. To reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and comply with the Government guidance which states that the following steps be taken to make the use of toilets as safe as possible:
  - In the toilets, there should be signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing technique.
  - Using social distancing marking in areas where queues normally form, and the adoption of a limited entry approach, with one in, one out (whilst avoiding the creation of

additional bottlenecks).

- To enable good hand hygiene, make hand sanitiser available on entry to toilets where safe and practical, and ensure suitable handwashing facilities including running water and liquid soap and suitable options for drying (either paper towels or hand dryers) are available. Communal towels should be removed and replaced with single use paper towels.
- Set clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage. Use normal cleaning products, paying attention to frequently hand touched surfaces, and consider the use of disposable cloths or paper roll to clean all hard surfaces.
- Keep the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate and safe to do so.
- Putting up a visible cleaning schedule that is kept up to date and visible.

## **10. Celebrations of Mass Outdoors**

- 10.1 If there is space for the celebration of Mass in the grounds belonging to the church which allows for social distancing guidelines to be fulfilled, and that all of the liturgical advice above can be provided safely, then there is no reason why Mass cannot be celebrated outside of a church within the boundary of the parish property.
- 10.2 If a Catholic parish school, or its grounds, is to be used for the celebration of Mass, a separate risk assessment has to be done; the appropriate school authority (Governing Body or Multi Academy Trust) has to give its permission, and both the parish and school insurers should be informed before the celebration takes place.
- 10.3 In celebrations of Mass outdoors, the maximum number of people present should take into account the area of the outdoor space and the social distancing requirements. Particular attention should be paid to how members of the congregation can arrive and leave the site safely whilst maintaining social distancing. Any surrounding surfaces that are touched (chairs, benches, etc.) should be regularly cleaned. There must be very clear rules about non-attendance of those who are symptomatic, those who are isolating as close contacts of a case or who has been advised to do so by NHS Test and Trace and those quarantining.
- 10.4 Any Mass which is celebrated outside of the church grounds or not in a public space will be restricted to the 'Rule of 6' guidance.

**✠ Marcus Stock  
Bishop of Leeds**

**12 January 2021**

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