

**Archdiocese of Southwark's Supplementary
Information to the CBCEW about Opening
Churches for Mass and other Liturgical Celebrations**

**Excerpts from Archbishop John Wilson's Letter to the
Clergy issued on Friday 26 June 2020**

The Government has announced that from 4 July it will be possible for churches to open again for Masses with a congregation. This is wonderful news I am grateful for the ways in which those parishes which have been able to open their churches have done so. For those not able to open, please do not feel any pressure. **The most important thing is that our churches are opened safely and with all the necessary hygiene, oversight, and social distancing measures in place.**

Please find attached guidance from the Bishops' Conference about reopening our churches for Masses with a congregation which I have adopted as mandatory in our Archdiocese. You will see that the total number of people allowed into a church for Mass will depend on the required social distancing measures. Government advice about this states that we either have:

a. 2m social distancing seating plan so there is 2m in all directions between each person/household;

or

b. 1m plus social distancing seating plan. This means that there must be at least 1m in all directions between each person/household and the plus means that, in churches, everyone in the congregation must wear a suitable face covering.

You will be best placed to determine which of these two options applies best in your situation. (At St. Ann's Parish we follow Option (a) – 2m social distancing...).

Please take note of all the information about the celebration of Mass moving forward. No church will be allowed to open for a public Mass unless all the measure required by the risk assessment for opening for individual prayer are already in place.

Please find attached various documents (these are available from St. Ann's Parish website):

Guidance for Acts of Worship – Mass

Guidance for Acts of Worship – Confession

A Message from the Archbishops' of England about the re-opening of Churches for Mass

Guidance for Acts of Worship – Funerals: outlines details for how a non-Eucharistic funeral liturgy may take place in church followed by committal at a crematorium or cemetery. The most pressing need has been for families to have a funeral Mass which will be possible again from the 4 July with all requirements in place.

Please take note especially of the points made clearly in the Archbishops' Message, and share these with your parishioners (please see St. Ann's Parish website):

It is important to reaffirm that, at present, the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains suspended. A significant number of churches may remain closed as they are unable to meet the requirements for opening for individual prayer. Fulfilling these requirements is a precondition for any church opening after the 4th July for the celebration of Mass with a congregation.

Please be aware that there will be a limit on the number of people who can attend Mass in our churches. This will be determined locally in accordance with social distancing requirements. We therefore need to reflect carefully on how and when we might be able to attend Mass. We cannot return immediately to our customary practices. This next step is not, in any sense, a moment when we are going 'back to normal.'

We ask every Catholic to think carefully about how and when they will return to Mass. Our priests may need to consider whether it is possible to celebrate additional Masses at the weekends. Given there is no Sunday obligation, we ask you to consider the possibility of attending Mass on a weekday. This will

ease the pressure of numbers for Sunday celebrations and allow a gradual return to the Eucharist for more people.

Moving forward, there will still be many people who cannot attend Mass in person. We therefore ask parishes, wherever possible, to continue live-streaming Sunday Mass, both for those who remain shielding and vulnerable, and also for those unable to leave home because of advanced age or illness.

When we return to Mass there will be some differences in how the celebration takes place. For the time being, there will be no congregational singing and Mass will be shorter than usual. None of this detracts from the centrality of our encounter with the Risen Christ in the Eucharist. We ask everyone to respect and follow the guidance that will be issued and the instructions in each church.

While the next steps are very important for us, we cannot simply return back immediately to where we were before lockdown. If you have any questions or concerns, please refer them to your Dean, Auxiliary Bishop/Episcopal Vicar, or here at Archbishop's House.

Prayer:

Protect, O God, your people

who trust in the patronage

of your Holy Apostles St Peter and St Paul.

May their faithfulness to your Son

inspire us to preach, teach, and live the Gospel.

In daily life, help us to witness to the power

of conversion and the new life

of the resurrection.

Give our shepherds and pastors

hearts of faith like the Apostles.

**Make us disciples who are firm in faith,
constant in prayer, and joyful in hope.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

O holy Apostles, St Peter and Paul, intercede for us.

I remain grateful for the ministry of each one of you and I am united with you and praying for you. Please pray for me.

With every blessing and the assurance of prayers

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ John

Most Rev John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark