

## To all Parishes in the Archdiocese of Southwark

26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020

### IMPORTANT:

**A/ REOPENING OF CHURCHES**

**B/ TRACK AND TRACE**

Dear Father,

### **A/ REOPENING OF CHURCHES**

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.

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 preached on *Corpus Christi* about 'Eucharistic yearning,' and we know so many of our people long to return to Mass.

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:

- i. a 2m social distancing seating plan so there is 2m in all directions between each person/household;  
or
- ii. a 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. 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 measures required by the risk assessment for opening for individual prayer are already in place.** Please find attached various documents:

1. **Guidance for Acts of Worship – Mass**
2. **Guidance for Acts of Worship – Confession**
3. **A Message from the Archbishops' of England about the re-opening of Churches for Mass**

Please also find another document – [Guidance for Acts of Worship – Funerals](#). This 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:

- 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. Fulfilling these requirements is a precondition for any church opening from 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.

### **BI TRACK AND TRACE**

In the Government document *Guidance for the safe use of places of worship from 4 July*, published on the 29 June, reference was made to the 'NHS Test and Trace service' which has been set up '...to manage the risk of the virus re-emerging.' This states: '*...In line with other government guidance for other venues ... you should assist this service [NHS Test and Trace] by keeping an accurate temporary record of visitors for 21 days, in a way that is manageable for your place of worship, and assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if needed for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks.*'

A message from Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, on the 29 June included the following key point relating to the Government Guidance:

*'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.'*

The request for cooperation with 'Test and Trace' was not foreseen when the original guidance was created by the Bishops' Conference, hence this additional email only a few days before the 4 July.

I appreciate that this will feel like additional bureaucracy at an already challenging time. I am sorry for any additional burdens, which it places upon you. It means, however, that

- Parishes should endeavour to create an accurate temporary record of those who attend Mass or another service in the church from the 4 July
- The record should include:
  - the name of the person / household group
  - A note of a suitable method for Test and Trace staff to make contact, i.e. a mobile phone number, email address, other phone number, or postal address
- The record should be collected as people enter church for Mass and retained securely for 21 days. Please keep records for each Mass separately in a secure envelope which clearly states the time and date of the Mass attended.
- The choice of method for recording this information is to be made by each parish. Among the possible options available are:
  - An advance booking system which will record contact details as people 'book' a place for Mass
  - Pre-completed cards to be filled in at home and brought to Mass. ([A template for such a card is attached](#))

- Stewards recording the relevant details as each person arrives for Mass
- Information recording must be done in a manner which meets the guidance for preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This will include not providing pens for reuse.
- If a visitor initially refuses to cooperate:
  - They should be asked to do so politely, reassuring them that this is in line with Government advice and an act in service of the common good for the potential benefit of all present.
  - If they do not wish to do so they should be invited to leave.
  - If any individual becomes aggressive and/or refuses to co-operate with any of the hygiene or social distancing requirements, this should be reported to the police.

The Catholic Church along with other groups has been given the opportunity to resume limited public worship in advance of some other activities and it is important that we demonstrate our seriousness by cooperating to the best of our ability with all that the Government is asking of us.

For the benefit of everyone, we will do all we can to *'control the virus and save lives.'*

If there are any further amendments or clarifications from the Bishops' Conference about this, I will, of course, pass these on as soon as possible.

With my deep appreciation for all that you are doing, and my prayers for all who are working to return our churches to public worship.

+ John

Most Rev John Wilson  
Archbishop of Southwark