

Dear All,

### Full Return to Sunday Mass

Some time ago, our Bishops decided, as part of the road map out of Covid, that the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays should be restored on the First Sunday of Advent (i.e. 28<sup>th</sup> November). On the basis that their decision stands, this obviously means that increased capacity in our Church has to be available. As a result, the system we have operated up to now needs to be changed.

Before getting into the details, I wish to point out that one major principle has been emphasised to us by the authorities, and that underpins what follows. It is that Covid is still very evidently with us. And so the official guidance is that the virus continues to pose a real threat. The risks of being exposed to it must continue to be minimized. If anyone would like further information on the principles involved, a good starting point is the Coronavirus page on our Bishops' website: [www.cbcew.org.uk/covid-guidance-collective-worship](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/covid-guidance-collective-worship) where there are helpful links to the Government and the Health and Safety Executive guidance and recommendations for places of worship.

So as to meet this situation for the start of Advent, after this weekend, we will no longer have a booking system for Masses. This brings important implications.

As to seating, the official guidance is that people have personal freedom of choice. That is to say: if you are happy to sit close to other people, then that is fine and your choice. In the same way, if you prefer to have some space between you and others, that is equally fine and your choice. Each option is deserving of the same respect. If you choose to have space, then an appropriate card expressing your choice will be available to you as you arrive for Mass and you then place it beside you.

Face coverings are an effective way of preventing the spread of the virus through droplets. All Church and Government guidance encourages the use of face coverings in enclosed spaces where we are mixing with people outside our families. I am therefore continuing that policy for our own Parish for the time being. Looking at the Health and Safety Executive website, I see that they review their policy at the end of each calendar month. This is obviously an example of good practice and I will do this for us here.

Obviously at the moment the big unknown is how our numbers will increase and whether we will have to review some of the practicalities of celebrating Mass. In the meantime, a reminder of current guidance might be helpful (whilst bearing in mind that our Bishops may, of course update this).

- Holy Water stoups remain empty (if people would like holy water for home, then please just ask me).
- Please continue to use hand sanitiser on entering the Church.
- Readers may use the Lectionary rather than sheets.
- The Offertory Collection with baskets may be resumed (but giving through envelopes and standing order is highly recommended). If anyone would be willing to be a collector at Mass, please let me know personally. The Offertory Procession itself remains suspended.
- The Sign of Peace is not given by physical contact.
- Communion is still under the form of the host only. The recommended way of receiving is in the hand; but anyone who wishes to do so may receive on the tongue.
- The priest will say “the Body of Christ” and “the Blood of Christ” to the congregation before Communion. The congregation replies “Amen”.

With regard to Weekday Masses, we will resume Thursday morning Mass as from 2<sup>nd</sup> December. On Saturdays, there will be greater scope for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and as from 4<sup>th</sup> December, this will be celebrated from 10.30-11.30am. During this time, there will be Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for all who wish to avail themselves of this very privileged opportunity for prayer.

The Government is still encouraging the use of track and trace so you are invited to sign in for Mass by use of the QR code or the list on the table at the back of the Church as you arrive.

Given these changes, I would envisage the role of steward as developing into that of greeter and I will have a word personally with all concerned.

Since we re-opened last July, many parishioners have commented on all the hard work and effort that has gone into making our Church safe and welcoming, and it is my privilege on behalf of the Parish to offer sincerest thanks to everyone who has helped achieve this. Equally, parishioners at large have brought a great spirit of care and support for each other to these last 16 months and let us pray to the Good Lord to continue to bless us in this way.

God bless you all,