

Reopening our Churches for Public Worship

July 2020



Information for Parishioners

Places of worship, closed in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, have been allowed to open for private prayer from 15 June 2020 and for public worship from 4 July 2020. There are, of course, a lot of things to consider in deciding when to reopen and there is guidance available from the government, the archbishops (nationally) and the diocese. This document seeks to bring together the different matters and advice that need to be considered. It is quite a lengthy and detailed document, reflecting the complexity of the situation we are faced with.

Treading Carefully

The first thing to note is that **we are advised to be cautious in taking the next steps** and not to feel obliged to do anything that we are not comfortable with or that we think might put people at risk. This applies to us as a parish community but also to each one of us individually. We all have a responsibility for ensuring our own safety and that of others.

Here are some extracts from the guidance/advice received:

1. "Managers of places of worship will have discretion over when they consider it safe to open and should decide to remain closed if they are not able to safely adhere to the guidelines outlined below." (Government Guidance, 29 June 2020; updated 9 July 2020)
2. "With the easing of restrictions on worship with congregations, we tread carefully along the path that lies ahead. Our lives have been changed by the experience of the pandemic and it is clear that we cannot simply return to how things were before lockdown." (Letter from the Archbishops of England, 24 June 2020)
3. "When we are in Church for Mass there are going to be quite a lot of rules and regulations about how we move around the Church, where we are seated and how we receive Holy Communion. That is because we are in a pandemic and do not think for one minute that we are out of the dangers of the pandemic." (Bishop John's homily, 28 June 2020)

Protecting People

The paramount principle is that we must not do anything that will endanger people's health or put their lives at risk. Consequently, we need to observe those things that, on present scientific evidence, are deemed to offer the greatest protection by minimising the risk of spreading the virus. These are:

4. Only opening our churches after they have been approved for opening by the diocese, following a risk assessment to determine that they are Covid-19 safety compliant. Both our churches have been approved to open once we have all the necessary things in place.
5. Having sufficient stewards in place to direct and assist people entering, whilst within and when leaving our churches and to ensure the correct and thorough cleaning of the church after each occasion. We have a team of stewards in place for private prayer at Ss Peter and Paul Church but will need more when we open for public worship both there and at St Luke's Church.

6. Promoting the basic hygiene principles about not coming to church if ill or in contact with someone who is ill, covering the mouth when coughing or sneezing and disposing of any tissues in the prescribed manner. The use of hand sanitising when entering or leaving the churches is a vital part of this hygiene routine. We already have the necessary equipment for this in use at Ss Peter and Paul and we have an alternative type ready for St Luke's.
7. Observing the social distancing guidance of 2 metres (except for members of a single household or bubble) with regard both to seating arrangements and any movement around the church. Although there is an alternative of "1 metre plus", this requires other measures to be in place which might prove difficult within a church setting, and even the government says it should only be used where the 2 metre distancing is not viable. So the diocese is stressing that we should keep to the 2 metres.
8. Limiting the number of people present. This is determined either by the capacity of the church building when set out for social distancing or by the nature of the worship. The government has determined a limit (a maximum of 30 participants) for what it calls life-cycle events (baptisms, weddings and funerals) unless the capacity of the church is smaller than that. The capacity figure for other public worship is the number of places where an individual can sit so that all present are socially distanced. This capacity can increase if people from the same household or bubble attend, since they are allowed to sit together.
9. Eliminating any activities that would be likely to increase aerosol transmission of droplets (such as singing or the use of wind instruments) or multiple contact with hard surfaces (such as passing the collection basket around). Hymn books have been removed from both our churches and any service sheets or newsletters distributed will be for single-use only (to be taken away by the user or deposited in a bin on the way out of church).
10. Keeping acts of public worship short in order to minimise the time spent indoors with people from different households. The archbishops have made certain recommendations about how we celebrate Mass in these circumstances (detailed below).

Self-Regulation

11. Clearly there is an expectation that people who are displaying any Covid-19 symptoms or who are in a household or in contact with anyone who is symptomatic will stay away. Anyone developing symptoms of Covid-19 whilst in a church should go home immediately and follow the stay-at-home guidance.
12. There is specific government advice about those who are shielding (who should continue to do so until told otherwise). Although (from 6 July) they are able to form a bubble with people from one other household (with a maximum of 6 meeting outdoors) they are still advised not to attend places of worship indoors. "Advice for both the clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable is however advisory and they can choose how to manage their own risks" (Government Guidance, 29 June 2020; updated 9 July 2020)
13. Likewise, the guidance says that those who "may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions" should be advised to stay at home as much as possible and "minimise contact with others outside of their household". Again this is advisory but in both cases (those shielding and those at increased risk) it is important that the individual weighs up the risk to themselves and to others before deciding on their course of action.
14. The archbishops have issued similar advice for clergy: "Priests should remain mindful of their own personal situation with respect to potential exposure to virus transmission. It is permissible for those in the 70+ age group, and those who are vulnerable to infection, to

celebrate Mass, but it is strongly advised that they do not distribute Holy Communion and take particular care to be constantly socially distant from the congregation. They should return to the sacristy directly after Mass is ended.”

15. The archbishops are also concerned to reduce the contact between priests (of any age) and people at this time to minimise risk of infection. So they suggest keeping the number of people in the sacristy or on the sanctuary to an absolute minimum and they specifically state that the priest should not go to the back of church after the Mass; the instructions say that, if he wishes to go to the back of church the priest must first remove his vestments (to stop any potential contamination via them).
16. The government guidance states that “The opening up of public places following the COVID-19 outbreak is being supported by the NHS Test and Trace service. In line with other government guidance for other venues including in the retail and hospitality sector, you should assist this service 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.” **Whilst this government guidance is not compulsory, we want to assist in this matter and so will be collecting the minimum data required from people coming into our churches (and storing it securely).**



















What will be different at Mass?

17. We will only be able to admit people up to the capacity of the church as laid out for social distancing (see 8 above). This means there will be a reduced number of participants for each Mass. We will need a mechanism for allocating attendance at any Masses celebrated where we anticipate the demand exceeding the capacity (see 40 below).
18. People will need to allow more time when arriving for Mass and will need to social distance whilst waiting to come into church. The timing of our Masses might be determined by any knowledge we have of other nearby communities also expecting people to be arriving at their premises. The most obvious example of this (from September) would be the timing of morning Mass at St Luke’s to avoid parishioners arriving at church at the same time as children and parents are arriving at St Luke’s School or at the pre-school in St Luke’s Centre.
19. On arrival at church, you will be greeted by a (socially-distanced) steward. Your contact details for Test and Trace (see 16 above and the attached form) will be collected from you and, once you have sanitised your hands, you will be shown to your place following the one-way system within the building. On Sundays and for some other celebrations, you will be given a single-use service sheet, unless you have brought your own missal or tablet.
20. Once you are within the church, please remain in your place unless asked to move by a steward (which should only be for Communion). Please do not go around the church touching statues or trying to light votive candles. Such contact with objects within the church would create unnecessary additional cleaning requirements for the stewards. With regard to votive candles, we will light a few prior to each Mass, symbolic of all our prayer intentions.
21. The government guidance says “If appropriate, you should reconfigure spaces to enable worshippers to be seated rather than standing which reduces the risk of contact.” Whilst we don’t need to reconfigure the seating in either church, we might sensibly take note of this suggestion and ensure we either sit or stand together throughout the Mass. We should certainly avoid kneeling down as that could encroach into the 2 metre gap between ourselves and someone who is seated or standing in front of us.

22. As noted in 10 above, the government guidance says, "It is advised that the ceremonies and services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time." Cutting out singing, albeit primarily for the reason of minimising aerosol/droplet risk, will help in this matter. The archbishops have suggested that we reduce the time spent in church by cutting out a few things from the celebration of Mass: the Prayers of the Faithful, the Offertory Collection and Offertory Procession – as well as the priest keeping the homily short (!) or replacing it with a few moments of silence. In addition, to further reduce any transmission risk (and duration), the sign of peace will be omitted. Whilst most of these items are quite short in themselves, the cumulative effect of omitting them will be beneficial in achieving the aim of briefer (and therefore safer) liturgies.
23. To reduce the potential contact between the priest and members of the congregation, minimising people in the sacristy or on the sanctuary (as noted in 15 above), the priest (rather than a sacristan) will prepare the things needed for Mass, so that sacred vessels and other items are not being touched by more people than necessary. It is especially required that the priest prepare his own paten and chalice, the cruets and the bowl for the lavabo. Things will be arranged so that the priest can manage without altar servers at this time.
24. Although the guidance offers advice about readers using hand sanitiser or wearing single-use gloves and avoiding touching the microphone or the Lectionary, apart from page turning, it seems sensible in these earliest days for the priest to proclaim the readings. This is in line with minimising the number of people on the sanctuary and the possible points of multiple contact liable to spread any infection that might be present.
25. Since we can't pass the collection basket around, there will be a basket available as you enter or leave the church for any donation you wish to make. Ideally more people will make their regular donation by standing order or via the online donation button on our website. We are also looking at a facility for contactless payment. The special (second or retiring) collections that we normally have throughout the year are all being re-arranged for the autumn.
26. Separate ciboria will be prepared for each person who is going to be giving out Communion, ideally with sufficient hosts for that particular celebration (so that the number of hosts placed in the tabernacle at the end is minimal). These ciboria will remain covered throughout Mass until it is time for Communion. The priest and any Eucharistic Ministers will sanitize their hands before and after distributing Communion.
27. Communion will be under one kind only and must be received in the hand (whilst standing) and without any physical contact between the minister and the communicant. In effect, the host is dropped into the communicant's hand. There will also be a physical barrier (such as a small table) between the minister and the communicant to help with this distancing. If by any chance there is contact between the two, both will need to sanitise their hands at that point.
28. One quite significant difference is that the usual individual exchange between the minister and the communicant ("The Body of Christ"..."Amen") will be omitted in order to minimise projection of droplets and avoid the need for the wearing of masks by the minister(s). So Communion will be distributed in silence.
29. Consequently, the missing individual dialogue will be done communally before the priest receives Communion. After the "Behold the Lamb of God"..."Lord, I am not worthy...", the priest will 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 receive Holy Communion under both kinds using his own Host and Chalice.

30. There are then two options for when Communion is distributed. Option 1 is for distribution at the usual time, with communicants returning to their places. Option 2 is for distribution at the end of Mass, with communicants leaving the church once they have received.
31. We have decided to go for Option 2, since this means that people do not need to return to their places after receiving Communion. For this option, once the priest has received Communion and purified the paten and chalice, a few moments of silence is observed and then the Post Communion Prayer is said followed by any brief notices, the final blessing and dismissal. Only then will Communion be distributed.
32. People will need to stay in their places until instructed by the stewards to move forward and they will need to observe social distancing whilst queuing (and whilst leaving the church after receiving Communion). Since you will not be returning to your place after receiving Communion, you will need to bring forward anything you have with you. Any single-use service sheets should be taken home or placed in the bin as you leave.
33. The government guidance says that “once [worship is] completed, participants should be encouraged to move on promptly, to minimise the risk of contact and spread of infection.” So having Communion at the end, with people leaving the church straightaway, should be a way of minimising the risk of people congregating outside the church with people from other households.
34. Likewise, if the priest is distributing Communion (or waiting on the sanctuary whilst Eucharist ministers distribute it) then this decides the issue of whether or not he should go to meet people at the end of the service. The priest not being at the door or outside actually prevents a potential bottleneck as people are leaving and encourages people to go home speedily, as well as helping to protect the priest from possible infection.
35. The most recent version of the government advice (9 July 2020) has this new paragraph: “Worshippers should limit their interactions with anyone they are not attending your Place of Worship with, i.e. if they are attending a communal service with one other household, wherever possible they should try not to engage in conversation with anyone outside of this group.”
36. After Mass, all vessels need to be washed in hot soapy water. The church needs to be closed so that it can be cleaned (in accordance with the existing guidelines for private prayer use) in preparation for the next service.
37. We recognise that these restrictions on what we can do at Mass cut across the desire to increase our participation in the celebration (as encouraged by Stage 3 of *Hope in the Future*). However, they are a necessary step at this stage to minimise risk for the majority of people. We hope that being able to gather again in this way, even taking something of a minimalist approach, is another step towards being able to celebrate Mass together without restrictions at some point in the future when it is safe to do so. For now, the main thing is that we can gather safely and participate in the Lord’s sacrifice as a community, receiving Holy Communion.
38. These various changes and necessary steps are summarised on this chart:

Guidelines for the Resumption of Public Mass

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS	LITURGICAL INSTRUCTIONS	COMMUNION
 <p>Keep two metres distance between people at all times.</p>	 <p>Please avoid all physical contact with fellow parishioners. The Sign of Peace will not take place.</p>	 <p>A one-way system will be marked to maintain the 2m distance during Communion.</p>
 <p>Stewards will be placed on the door to manage the flow of people in and out.</p>	 <p>Congregational singing will not take place. No wind instruments or pipe organs are to be used and recorded music is suggested.</p>	 <p>Only the priest should consume the celebrant's host.</p>
 <p>Numbers will be limited based on capacity, with social distancing in mind.</p>	 <p>There will be no offertory collection. Donations will be accepted in one specific place, but direct debit is encouraged.</p>	 <p>Except during Communion, the priest should not wear a mask.</p>
 <p>Face masks are not compulsory but stewards may wear one when dealing with people.</p>	 <p>No offertory procession will take place. The gifts will be brought from the credence table.</p>	 <p>The precious blood will not be distributed at this time.</p>
 <p>You may be required to leave your name and contact details with stewards for Test and Trace.</p>	 <p>The Priest will wash his own hands at the Lavabo.</p>	 <p>Hands must be sanitised both before and after distributing Communion.</p>
 <p>Please use provided hand sanitiser as you enter and leave the church. The church will be cleaned between Masses.</p>	 <p>There will be no Hymn books or shared materials. Readers will be encouraged not to touch the Lectionary. Parishioners can bring their own Missals.</p>	 <p>Communion should be taken in the hand while standing. People should be guided by the stewards, including when leaving the church.</p>

If you have any symptoms of coronavirus or have been in contact with someone who has symptoms, please stay at home.

For further information please visit: www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/news/covid19

Practical Considerations

39. Bishop John has suggested that we start by opening for weekday Masses before opening for Sunday Masses and indeed that we encourage those who can come during the week to do so in order to leave maximum capacity at the Sunday Masses for those who can't come during the week, bearing in mind that the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays is currently suspended. **Subject to having sufficient volunteer stewards, we intend to start admitting people to Mass from Monday 20 July. We still need to decide on the pattern of Masses we can offer to parishioners and that will be published in due course.**

40. As noted in 8 and 17 above, we will only be able to admit people up to the capacity of the church as laid out for social distancing. This means there will be a reduced number of participants for each Mass. We will need a mechanism for allocating attendance at any Masses that are celebrated where we anticipate the demand exceeding the capacity. This would in effect constitute a booking system and, if required, details will be made known so that people have an equal chance of applying for the available places.

41. There is, of course, the potential scenario of people coming along to church and having to be turned away because capacity has already been reached. If this occurs, those people will be given priority for attendance at another Mass as soon as possible.

42. The streaming of Masses has been greatly appreciated during the lockdown period. Obviously it will not be as crucial once people can attend (even though they won't be able to attend daily). There could be some merit in continuing to stream some Masses but then questions arise as to whether to do this with the church locked (as at present) or with a congregation present. The latter situation raises further issues about location of the camera and, more importantly, having permission to film anyone who appears on it. **Once we determine the pattern of Masses, we will be able to also determine the Masses we will stream.**

43. A very practical consideration is the use of toilets within the church. Initial advice was that these should be kept closed (except in an emergency) because of the cleaning regime required after anyone has used them. The government guidance contains some detailed instructions

on the steps to be taken in order to keep toilets open and carefully managed to reduce risk of virus transmission. Whilst we intend to work with this guidance, please ensure that you only use the toilet facilities at church if absolutely necessary so as to minimise the cleaning work (and the linked risk of infection) for the stewards.

Other Celebrations and Activities

44. There is more specific guidance for baptisms, weddings and funerals (all limited, by the government, to a maximum of 30 participants) which we can discuss with the relevant parties as and when these celebrations are being considered.
45. Bishop John has determined that celebration of First Communion, postponed from May/June should be deferred until September and beyond. Further details will be issued to the families involved in the current Sacramental Programme once we are clear about how we are going to proceed. We will also need to give some thought to how we provide the Sacramental Programme for the next group if numbers allowed to gather together are still restricted.
46. For the moment, Confessions need to be conducted in an open space, allowing for confidentiality but also observing a range of Covid-19 safety measures, so we will not advertise set times for these but will respond to individual requests as and when it is practical to do so.
47. Visits to the sick and the dying still need to be judged on a case by case basis. The archbishops advise that "Home visits should only take place after the Government has relaxed lockdown conditions so that it is permissible to enter another person's home. When this condition is met then extreme caution should be taken to avoid any possibility of passing infection between the priest and the housebound parishioner." On this basis, it is likely that a priest will only visit where the parishioner is in danger of death and will then wear a mask and gloves whilst celebrating the sacrament of the sick.
48. There are specific instructions on concelebration, both for priests within the same household (community) and for those coming from a number of different locations. At present, it is probably best to avoid concelebration and the related risks.
49. Once the churches reopen for public worship, we will retain some opportunities for private prayer (at least for the moment). This is quite different from Mass and there may be people who would avail of this whilst feeling uncomfortable amongst larger (albeit constrained) gatherings for Mass.
50. With opportunity to attend Mass or to pray privately in front of the Blessed Sacrament, it seems unnecessary to continue with the currently streamed periods of adoration. We might occasionally stream other devotions (which may or may not have a congregation).

Final Comments

51. This document started with a note of caution, about treading carefully as we take the next steps. The archbishops and Bishop John have highlighted the fact that we are in no sense now returning to "normal", whatever that might be. The government advice also has a caveat: "This guidance remains under review and may be updated in line with the changing situation". So we will need to keep whatever arrangements we make here in the parish under review and be prepared to adapt as necessary, even perhaps at short notice.
52. To illustrate that need to review and adapt, at the time of publishing this document the government has announced that shoppers must wear face masks from 24 July. Whilst there is no such determination regarding churches, that is something that could easily change.

53. As noted in 5 above, “having sufficient stewards” is vital to us being able to reopen our churches and so we are grateful to those who have offered to serve in this capacity for the benefit of our community.
54. There will be a further document (much shorter!) in the coming week to give details of the times of Masses once these have been decided.
55. The following parishioners have kindly agreed to be points of contact if anyone has questions relating to the reopening of our churches: Liz Ainley (0161 736 5768), Kevin Garner (07505 448072), Joan Sweeney (0161 736 5588) & Kevin Walker (07888 666368).
56. A form for collecting consent and contact details for attendees at places of worship is attached to this document. You will need to complete one of these whenever you visit the churches and ideally you will come along with it already completed (apart from the timings) since we will not be able to have pens being used by more than one person.

Canon Michael Cooke VG
Parish Priest
14 July 2020

Form for collecting consent and contact details for attendees at places of worship



In order to support the NHS Test and Trace programme, we are taking contact details (name and telephone number) for all visitors, as well as recording times entering and leaving the churches of St Luke or Ss Peter & Paul, within the parish of Our Lady of Hope.

In line with guidance issued by the Department for Health and Social Care, we will keep your details safely and in compliance with GDPR legislation for 21 days before securely disposing of or deleting them. We will only share your details with NHS Test and Trace, if asked, in the event that it is needed to help stop the spread of coronavirus. We will not use your details for any other purposes or pass them on to anyone else.

Thank you for your understanding.

If you agree to providing your information for this reason, please complete the following:

Name (*Print clearly*):

Church attended:

Telephone Number:

St Luke

Signature:

Ss Peter & Paul

Date:

Time of arrival:
(*Completed by Steward*)

Time of departure:
(*Completed by Steward*)