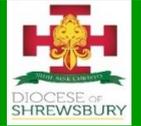


# Health and Safety Guidance

## Reopening of Churches for Private Prayer, 'Covid -19 Secure'



### **Purpose of the Guidance**

As the UK Government is in the process of taking initial steps to return our Country to a more 'normal' state, post Coronavirus pandemic; there is a wish to consider the reopening of our churches, which have been closed since the end of March 2020, initially for short periods of private prayer only. If this is to be workable, we **must** be able to adhere to the Government's 'Covid-19 Secure' guidelines. It is important that people can follow the Government guidelines, whilst outside of their homes, to remain safe and avoid transmission of the virus.

This Health and Safety Guidance has been prepared to aid and assist each Parish Priest to consider the arrangements required to adhere to the Government's 'Covid-19 Secure' guidelines and enable their church to be reopened in a suitable, safe, and secure manner. It should be read in conjunction with the 'Guidance on Reopening of Catholic Churches for Individual Prayer' from the Bishops of England and Wales agreed by the Government Task Force (available from Ad Clerum June 2020)

### **Management of the reopening of the Parish Church**

Each Parish will nominate a 'Covid-19 Safety Lead' who will assist in the management and implementation of these safety procedures. It is recognised that in some Parishes the Priest may themselves be self-isolating (in accordance with the instruction by the public health policy to shield themselves) therefore an individual or a group should be appointed to undertake a suitable and sufficient risk assessment of their churches' arrangements and decide whether it is safe to reopen their church for short periods of private prayer (i.e. no more than 15 minutes per person). They will decide the times of the reopening which will be notified to all parishioners. A risk assessment proforma is associated with this document to assist the 'Covid-19 Safety Lead' implement this guidance.

### **Stewarding of the reopened churches**

A suitable and sufficient number of willing parishioners should be appointed to act as Stewards who will facilitate the opening of the church. It is important that this team of volunteers are not drawn from those who have been instructed to self-isolate (i.e. over 70 years of age, pregnant women or with underlying health conditions). Two Stewards will be in attendance at **all** opening times of the church (ideally at least two at one time where possible) to direct and assist visitors to maintain the 'social distancing' rules. People from the same household can sit together but those not from the same household should maintain social distancing while in church. Children may attend, but parents or guardians must manage them appropriately, particularly ensuring that they touch as few surfaces as possible.

All Stewards will be informed and instructed on this guidance and their church's completed risk assessment. They will be provided with suitable Personal Protective Equipment (i.e. disposable face mask and gloves) and a means of frequently washing their hands and/or applying hand sanitiser during their time on duty. Each Stewards' time on duty should be limited to one or one and half hours (maximum of two hours) due to the restricted welfare arrangements in the church. No food or drink to be consumed during the time on duty. To prevent contamination, from hand to face, if necessary only water bottles without screw tops (squeezable sports type bottles) should be used. Stewards

should be aware of their own personal safety and health whilst on duty and should maintain social distancing within the church.

The Stewards will ensure strict social distancing (2 metres apart or 6ft. between each person) is maintained by persons entering and leaving the church, appropriately in line with the maximum capacity of the church and any 'one way system' in place; and also directing visitors to appropriate seating within the body of the church.

### **Layout of the church**

The 'Covid-19 Safety Lead' and/or group will consider the layout of the church. If possible, people should enter and leave the church via separate doors. If this is not possible a one way system may be required and Stewards to do all they can to ensuring strict social distancing is maintained when visitors are entering and leaving. This may include a 'one person in, one person out' rule.

The church floor is to be marked (with appropriate tape) indicating the 2 metre social distances required and suitable areas of seating, benches, or chairs, to be allocated; whilst other seating marked off to prevent the social distancing rule to be breached. It may be possible to identify limited certain areas of seating to be available, or reconfiguration of seating (removing seats or pews) to reduce the potential of cross contamination of furnishings throughout the church.

This process may indicate the maximum number of people able to visit the church at any one time. However, a maximum of **no more than 10 visitors** at any one time should be exceeded. This will assist the Stewards to apply the strict social distancing rules. This should be clearly indicated to all parishioners prior to the opening of the church to avoid unnecessary queuing outside of the church.

Similarly all other areas where people may sit or kneel for prayers should be 2 metres apart in any direction.

Maintain as much ventilation, within the church space as possible; keeping doors (and windows if possible) open, decreases transmission risk through touching but also allows a flow of fresh air into the church space.

The Confessionals should not be made available as their confined space do not enable the social distancing to be maintained. An alternative location should be considered, preferably outdoors, weather permitting, as it is understood that the virus is less likely to transfer between people in the open air. Chairs or benches may be set up within the garden. Privacy is obviously required but the current 2 meter social distancing rules to still be adhered to where possible (this may change in the future as the Government consider reduction of the 2 metre distance) Consideration should be given to the use of face covering for both Priest and Parishioner during this.

### **Provision of equipment**

Each church must ensure adequate supplies of suitable equipment etc. are available. These can be bought from on-line providers - Church Marketplace, Amazon etc and should be purchased prior to the reopening of the church.

These include:

- Personal protective equipment (PPE) – disposable mask, gloves, and aprons for cleaners
- Alcohol hand gel/sanitiser (at least 65% alcohol)
- Cleaning products (domestic disinfectants and detergents are acceptable) and disposable cloths
- Suitable marking tape (yellow/black adhesive for floor marking and red/white for shielding seating)
- Waste receptacles with lid, i.e. swing or foot operated peddle bin.

## **Maintaining good hygiene standards**

Alcohol hand gel/sanitiser (at least 65% alcohol) should be made available at the entrance and exit to the church and the Stewards to invite all visitors to apply it to their hands before they enter the church. All printed materials, Mass books, Hymn books, printed pamphlets, and leaflets are to be removed from the church. If necessary, only single use printed materials, which must be taken away from the church, should be available.

The toilet facilities, used by the public, are to remain closed to prevent transmission of the disease. However if the hand washing facilities, within the toilets, are required by the Stewards, liquid soap must be provided and the facilities cleaned frequently.

Votive candles are to be placed in the holders by the Stewards who will monitor their use and replace the candles as required, removing the potential cross contamination of the box of candle supplies. Stewards on duty will light an initial votive candle and visitors may use that to ignite additional candles, removing the need for match boxes. Stewards will be responsible for extinguishing the votive candles at the end of their time on duty or as the church closes for private prayer.

Physical veneration of relics or other object of devotion is not to be permitted. No holy water is to be placed in the church stoups and access to them removed.

## **Cleaning of the church**

The church will be cleaned, throughout, at least once a day, using the appropriate cleaning materials, paying particular attention to frequently touched areas such as rails, door handles, collection boxes etc. However, more frequent cleaning of the areas that are likely to be touched, by visitors, should be undertaken; at least at no less than (one or) two hourly intervals depending on number of visitors. These include handrails, backs of chairs/benches and door handles etc. Domestic cleaning products such as detergent and disinfectants are suitable to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus.

People who undertake cleaning of the church and furnishings should wear appropriate disposable washing up gloves and aprons. Cleaning should be carried out using disposable cloths and paper towels. All disposable items, PPE (face masks, gloves, aprons, and cleaning cloths) must be placed in a waste receptacle with a lid, such as a swing bin or foot operated peddle bin. These waste items to be disposed of appropriately i.e. double bagged left for 72 hours, stored away from potential animal attraction (foxes/dog/cats) such as indoors and via routine waste collection).

## **Visitor Information**

Suitable notices and signage should be made available at the entrance to the church indicating:

- the times that the church is open for short private prayer (max.15 minutes per person)
- the maximum number of visitors able to attend at any one time (no more than 10 visitors)
- requesting that visitors apply the hand sanitiser, provided, before they enter and leave the church
- that all visitors adhere to the social distancing rules, follow any designated route within the church and only sit within the allocated seating
- that they should not touch or physically venerate statues, relics, or the church stoop
- state that the church toilet facilities are closed
- take away with them any printed material that they have picked up while in the church
- request that they cooperate with the Stewarts who are there to assist them to be able to visit the church whilst maintaining health and safety for all.
- People with cold or flu-like symptoms should be asked not to enter the church

## **Additional information**

All Stewards on duty are aware of the church fire procedures and in an emergency are ready to ask everyone to leave the premises in an orderly fashion following their directions.

Stewards are not to physically assist people unless it is absolutely necessary such as emergency first aid. They must keep their own safety paramount, ensuring they wash or sanitise their hands before and after any personal encounter. A note of any such aid given should be recorded in the church's accident book.

This guide is provided as the first step in the reopening of our churches, initially for private prayer. Further information will be given once the UK Government advises on the opening of place of worship.