

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

Public Celebration of Mass in England and Wales

Following the Government announcement that Places of Worship were able to **re-open** for **Services** on **July 4th 2020**,



Bishop Richard Moth has written to announce that Masses may be celebrated publicly once again in the Diocese. The Bishop kindly asks for your continued understanding about the use of hand sanitiser and social distancing measures in Church, and adds his voice to that of the Bishops' Conference in asking everyone to respect and follow the guidance that will be issued, and the instructions given, in each Church.



With regard to the public celebration of Mass and minimising the risk of virus transmission, the Archbishops of Westminster, Liverpool, Birmingham and Southwark have written to all Catholics in England: "It is important to re-affirm that, at present, **the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains suspended** ... 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 ... We ask every Catholic to think carefully about how and when they will return to Mass. 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".

Following what the Archbishops have written regarding the possibility of the Faithful attending Mass on a weekday rather than over the weekend, we have decided to celebrate our daily 6:00 p.m. Mass in the **Church** rather than in the **House Chapel** from Monday 6th July 2020 until further notice.

Our Sunday Eucharist and COVID-19

Here at the **Sacred Heart Church in Sunningdale**, we understand that the current situation has been a testing time for everyone, but also that we need to ensure we are still able to care for you and your spiritual needs. That is why we have been working to adapt the way we will now have to publicly celebrate the Eucharist so that we can begin to welcome you back as safely as possible.

Every single decision we have made, and every step we have taken, has been with a focus on the safety of you, the Faithful, and of our Priests. We appreciate that things will feel a little different to your usual experience, and that you may be concerned, so here is some information on how things will look and feel for the time being.



We evidently must adhere to Government (Public Health England) Guidance and so are restricted to the **number of people** we can allow **in the Church** at any one time. The Government maintains that a **'two metre'** social distance is required where possible, and that 'one metre plus' was only permitted where a 'mitigation of risk' is also applied. We were advised by the Bishops' Conference that in the case of Catholic Churches opting for a 'one metre plus' social distance would mean the **compulsory** wearing of a face covering

for all Members of the Congregation and for the Priest celebrating Mass. After careful consideration, we decided to opt for the **'two metre'** social distance which initially did not require the compulsory wearing of a face covering for everyone attending Mass. We could therefore allow **sixty-eight (68)** of the Faithful attend any one Mass: **fifty-four (54)** in the main Church and **six (6)** in the Choir Loft and **eight (8)** in the Side Loft. The places where people can sit were clearly indicated with a green sticker. We do appreciate that this may cause inconvenience to a number of people who usually attend our Masses and can only offer our sincere apologies in advance.

The **doors** at the main and side entrances are generally (weather permitting) left wide open **before** and **after** Mass so as to allow people to enter and leave Church without having to touch the door handles.

The Government made the 'Test and Trace Service' mandatory from **Monday 28th September 2020** in all Places of Worship in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. As a result any of the Faithful wishing to attend Religious Services in Church are required to register their presence by **either** scanning the **'QR Code'** with their mobile telephone at the door as they enter **or** by giving their name and a point of contact (*postcode, telephone number or e-mail address*) to one of the Marshalls or Stewards.

As you will be aware the aim of this latest measure is to quickly be able to alert anyone who may have inadvertently come into direct contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, have them self-isolate and thereby help prevent further transmission of this deadly virus.



We ask that you **sanitise your hands** with the 'hands-free sanitiser' that is provided at the main and side entrances to Church and that you avoid touching the door handles of any of the interior doors. All door handles will, however, still be sanitised before and after all Services in Church.

As you will be aware the Government then extended the **requirement** to wear a **face covering** to include Places of Worship as well as shops and supermarkets. The new regulations were mandatory, and enforceable in law, from **Saturday 8th August 2020**.

All those who are attending Church are therefore required to wear a face covering unless they were exempt from doing so. This is for the good of all who gather in the Church for Services as it is an enclosed public space where there are people from differing households who do not normally meet together. Information regarding those who are exempt from wearing a face covering can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

Missalettes and Church Newsletters will be available at the Church entrances - please take copies for yourself. We ask that you **take** them home with you and **do not leave** them in the Church after Mass.

Although there will be no **Holy Water** provided in the font/stoop at the main and side entrances to Church, miniature bottles of Holy Water that are handy for your pocket or handbag are available to use and for you to take home.

The **places within the pews or the chairs** where people should sit **are clearly marked**, and one of the 'Stewards' or 'Marshals' will show you to your place. Families can sit together but again do please adhere to the 'two metre' social distancing rules with regard to all other individuals around you.



If **lighting a candle**, we ask that you ensure you take just the candle(s) you are going to use and light it/them from the candle already burning at the side altars.

There will unfortunately be **no Altar Servers** during this time, and we can only look forward to the time when our young people can again serve the Lord at the altar.

With regard to **Offerings**, collecting bags will **not** be passed from person to person, but rather will be held by the individual Steward/Marshal who is asked to move around the benches and then take their respective bag to the altar. The Offertory Procession is suspended until further notice.



There will be naturally no invitation to shake hands during the '**Sign of Peace**'.

The Priests will sanitise their hands **before** and **after** distributing Holy Communion, and this will be given with the Communicant **standing** at the altar rails **silently** and in the **hand** only. Holy Communion will be distributed to those in the front pews first and people are asked to wait in their places until it is their turn to move forward to the altar rails, and then move back to the pews in an orderly manner. Those seated in the **Choir** and **Side Lofts** are kindly requested to remain in their places, until the Faithful in the main body of the Church have received Holy Communion, and then are asked to make their way to the altar rails.



Please leave Church, **with the leaflets you have used**, in an orderly way allowing plenty of space for each person leaving around you.

There will be no traditional greeting by the Clergy after Mass as the Bishops' Conference asks that the Faithful are encouraged to return home and not remain around the main entrance to Church.

After Mass we will have a team of volunteers on hand to sanitise all the benches, chairs, altar rails and so on that need to be disinfected.

We hope that with the above instructions you can rest assured when visiting the Sacred Heart Church that every reasonable precaution has been taken to ensure the safety of everyone. This is our top priority as we begin re-opening our doors and return to sharing the Celebration of the Eucharist with you. If you have any questions at all regarding this guidance, please do not hesitate to contact Father Julio or Father Martin.

PS Since the doors and the windows of the Church need to remain open for ventilation during the celebration of Mass, please do bring a warm jacket with you. It may be a little chilly in Church!

September 28th 2020