



Archdiocese of Southwark

Letter to the Clergy

Concerning the Measures to be put in place Regarding Public Worship and the Celebration of the Sacraments in Relation to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic

Dear brothers in Jesus Christ

This is a Lent like we have not experienced before. We entered the desert with Christ and we now face a time that will be testing for us and our people in ways we did not expect. I therefore wanted to write to you to assure you of my spiritual closeness at this time. I also wanted to make sure that you are aware of all the necessary changes that have to be made.

The measures that have been put in place nationally to address the spread of the COVID-19 Coronavirus must now also take effect in our pastoral and liturgical life. To help implement this, accompanying this letter, you will find three other documents:

1. A Joint Public Letter from the President and Vice President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference to the Church in England and Wales
2. A document of Liturgical Advice to Bishops
3. A Pastoral Letter to the clergy, consecrated religious and laity of the Archdiocese of Southwark which has been made available through

the internet and social media, and can be photocopied and made available in parishes.

Please note: I have formally adopted the document of Liturgical Advice to Bishops and this is to be mandatory in the Archdiocese of Southwark from Friday evening, 20 March 2020, until further notice. In light of this, and with some particular adaptations for the Archdiocese of Southwark, it is required that:

1. Celebrations of Holy Mass

Priests (parish priests and assistant priests) who hold parochial office should continue to celebrate Mass in a church within their parish, without the faithful, on a daily basis. Other priests (i.e. those retired from office or entrusted with a non-parochial ministry) may celebrate Mass without the faithful in a church, chapel or their private home.

It is permissible to have one other person, who may be a deacon, present at the celebration of the Mass to make the necessary responses. Deacons should not otherwise participate in these celebrations. The other person must not be in any vulnerable category with respect to COVID-19. There must not, however, be more than one other person with the priest, whether a deacon or a lay person.

Apart from an exceptional circumstance, which requires the permission of the Archbishop, there should not be any concelebration. Where two priests concelebrate, in order that one might also make the responses, Holy Communion should be by personal intinction (as is the common practice in Roman Basilicas). The principal celebrant should then consume the remaining Precious Blood and purify the chalice in the normal way. Where a deacon or lay person assists, Holy Communion should only be given as the Host in the hand. Before and after the

celebration of Mass there should handwashing by the priest and other participant and there should only be a verbal sign of peace.

The continuing celebration of Mass ensures that the faithful can join in spiritual communion with the priests of the Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: *'As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out.'* (CCC 1364) Daily liturgical resources for those at home, including those for making a Spiritual Communion, will be available on the CBCEW website.

Information about the live-streaming of the celebration of Mass is available on diocesan and other websites so that the faithful can participate in the prayers of the priest at Mass at home. A fine example of this is from The National Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham. which will continue its full liturgical programme and this will be available to all via the Internet (www.walsingham.org.uk)

Wherever possible, during this period, churches will remain open, especially on Sundays, for individual private prayer, without any organised services, and offering prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

2. The Sacrament of Baptism

The Sacrament of Baptism should be deferred until such time that the public health advice is that congregations can gather safely. In case of necessity, baptisms should be celebrated with all the hygiene precautions that have been laid down by the Church in its COVID-19 advice.

3. The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Confession may be offered on request as long as hygiene and social distancing requirements are observed (e.g. a physical barrier between the

penitent and the priest such as a grille and cloth). The use of Rite II and Rite III of the Rite of Penance is not permitted as this, by necessity, requires the gathering of people in our churches. It is not permitted for people to queue for confession in close proximity.

4. First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion

These celebrations should be postponed until a time that allows for families and friends to gather safely within our churches.

5. The Sacrament of Confirmation

The celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation should be deferred until such time that the public health advice is that congregations can resume public worship.

6. The Sacrament of Matrimony

If possible, the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony should be deferred until such time that people can gather in numbers safely. However, if this is not possible and only in the most pressing of circumstances, then those present for the marriage should be restricted to the celebrant, bride and groom and immediate family, and if necessary, the legal Registrar.

7. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

No pastoral visits should be made to people who are self-isolating until the isolation period ends. However, please offer telephone support.

When anointing the sick, the Oil of the Sick can be applied using a cotton bud which can be burned afterwards (one end should be used to anoint the head and the other to anoint the hands). The priest extend his hands

over the sick person for laying on of hands, but without physical contact. This has been confirmed as a valid mode of celebrating the sacraments which involve 'laying on of hands.' Visits to people in nursing and care homes, hospitals or hospices should follow the advice of healthcare staff on infection control.

8. Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil

This will be dependent on the forthcoming decisions of the Bishops for the Holy Week ceremonies.

9. Funeral Liturgies

There must be great pastoral sensitivity to this issue. The funeral service should take place at the graveside or at a crematorium, subject to the conditions laid down by the cemetery or crematorium authorities. Arrangements should be made for a Mass to be celebrated in memoriam when congregations are allowed to gather.

I appreciate that these measures will have a significant and direct impact upon our ministry and the life of our parishes. None of us would choose to be in this situation, but it is essential that we follow these procedures.

It is also vital that we look after ourselves and each other as bishops, priests, and deacons. I repeat here the information sent out earlier this week about clergy care, especially for the vulnerable:

Contact with Deans Regarding Clergy Self Isolating

Background

Guidance from government today has stated that from Saturday those with serious medical conditions should be shielded from the general population for the next 12 weeks. The government has stopped short of the expected advice that all those over the age of 70 should self-isolate. This may or may not come later.

Those who experience any COVID-19 symptoms should self-isolate for 7 days and those who live with others should self-isolate for 14 days if someone in the house has symptoms.

We are in unprecedented times and the Archbishop wishes to ensure that there is a clear protocol in place should a priest have to self-isolate. This is to ensure that every priest has someone who can support them and offer care. Everyone needs to have provision in place to be able to get food, shopping and medicine. Each priest should know what to do and who to contact.

We are asking all deans, if they have not already done so, to contact each priest in their deanery to:

- Check if they fall into a vulnerable group
- Ensure that they have a support network who they can contact should they need to self-isolate and who would be able to get shopping etc. (this may be parish staff, parishioners, friends etc.). If not the dean should help the priest to make provision.
- Make sure they inform the dean if they are self-isolating and to arrange a time each day to make or receive a welfare call from a nominated person.
- Be sure that if they are self-isolating in the presbytery that they understand that the presbytery and parish must be shut down until the isolation period is over.

Deans should ask parish priests to ensure their parish deacons have similar support in place.

Each dean should also have a nominated deputy in the deanery who will take over this welfare role should the dean need to self-isolate and let all priests in the deanery, and the Chancery, know who that is.

If something happens in the deanery that the dean or parish priest is not sure how to respond to or he feels should be shared with others in the Archdiocese please email it to covid19@rcaos.org.uk

If you have serious health or welfare concerns regarding priests in your deanery please contact either Lynn Del Bianco or Teresa South on priestswelfare@rcaos.org.uk

The measures outlined in this Letter are to be implemented from Friday evening, 20 March 2020 until further notice. Concerning this coming weekend it will be necessary to:

1. Share this information on your parish website / social media platform as soon possible.
2. Put a notice on the doors of the church with words to the effect of:

Following the national guidance of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, there will be no public celebrations of Mass in this church until further notice. The church will be open, whenever possible, for private prayer. Also, where possible, the Blessed Sacrament will be exposed for Adoration. At all times social distancing must be observed while in the church, and on entering and leaving it. For more information please see the Archdiocese of Southwark website.

3. Make available copies of the Pastoral Letter I have issued in relation to the COVID-19 Coronavirus.
4. Through leaflets, booklets and notices, provide information about live-stream celebrations of the Mass and prayers and devotions, including explanations of Spiritual Communion.
5. Please advertise details of the live-streaming of the celebration of Mass from churches within the Archdiocese of Southwark, details of which can be found on the Archdiocesan website.

It is a great sadness that these measures have an impact on the planned funeral liturgies for Archbishop Peter Smith. There will now be a private Reception of the Body and Funeral Liturgy, with burial in the Cathedral vault. At a later date, when the restrictions have been removed, a Mass in memoriam will be celebrated where we can all gather together. Please continue to pray for the repose of his soul.

It is so important that we approach the period ahead with personal faith and prayer, doing all we can to support those in our care. Let us also pray for each other and keep in touch with each other, remembering that the Lord is our help and our strength.

With every blessing

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Wilson', with a small cross at the beginning and a horizontal line underneath.

The Most Reverend John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark

Archbishop's House, Southwark, 18 March 2020