

Dear Fathers and Deacons

Dear Parishioners

I invite you to read this letter together with the two attached statements as they outline our present liturgical and pastoral practice in the light of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. These cannot cover every possible situation so I would ask you to exercise prudent pastoral judgement in respect of these guidelines.

I ask all recipients to share this information as widely as possible. I also clergy to make copies of this email and accompanying statements available for those who do not have access to them electronically and to leave them at the back of their churches.

Each bishop has been asked to write to his own diocese and so I offer the following guidelines as a clarification of the national guidelines for the clergy and faithful of the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

The measures outlined may seem very drastic but they are a necessary and proportional temporary response to protecting the most vulnerable in our society.

*O God, come to our aid;
O Lord, make haste to help us!*

Care for Priests and Deacons

Those who are over 70, and those with significant underlying health issues, should take particular care at this time not to make themselves vulnerable to any risk. General contact with parishioners should be minimised so that the risk of transmission of the virus is significantly reduced.

Celebrations of Holy Mass

As of Friday 20th March, a major change is that **the celebration of Mass will not be public in any setting**. Can clergy please put a notice on their church door notifying people of this change, especially in time for this Sunday.

Priests will celebrate Mass privately each day. As they do so, the church will remain closed to the public – which includes all parishioners.

Mass intentions attached to these Masses will be honoured. As priests will only be required to celebrate one Mass each day, some Mass intentions will need to be postponed to a later date.

In line with the Bishops' Conference guidance, **only priests may be present for the celebration of Mass**. As even Deacons are not permitted to be present, I need to emphasise that nobody else may be present for the celebration of Mass.

The obligation for the faithful to attend Holy Mass on Sundays and Holydays of Obligation is removed until further notice.

Since all of the faithful will be asked to make a **Spiritual Communion** (rather than receiving Holy Communion) during this time, those confined to home who normally receive Holy Communion from Sunday Mass will also be asked to make a Spiritual Communion. This will mean they will not receive Holy Communion regularly as at present. Clergy may make visits to sick parishioners in accordance with the guidelines already given. Care should be taken to ensure social distancing of the most vulnerable is maintained, including the welfare of those who visit. I draw priests' attention to specific guidance already given on the anointing of the sick.

Live-streaming of Masses is advertised on the Diocesan website (www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk) and we expect the number of these live-streams to grow, including at St Chad's Cathedral in the near future. If clergy could inform the Communications team at Cathedral House if they can add to the facilities already listed, that would be appreciated.

At other times and wherever this is possible, **churches should remain open for private prayer**. This may include periods of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament but the emphasis must be on private prayer and not gathering the people. I ask that there is no Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament since this constitutes a public service.

Baptisms, Sacrament of Reconciliation, First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion, Confirmation, Matrimony

Please follow the guidelines given in the Bishops' Conference Liturgical Advice document.

Funerals

Regrettably, while public Funeral Masses must also cease, it is recommended that on the day of a Funeral, a Mass without the faithful may be offered by the priest for the intentions of the deceased and the family. This will be of some consolation to the family in the absence of a public Funeral Mass. I recommend that a later Mass with the faithful be celebrated when restrictions are lifted.

We live in difficult and unprecedented times. I, together with my brother Archbishops of England and Wales, will be reviewing these guidelines regularly and taking into account best advice. I shall update you on any changes that are necessary. In all we face, we know that the Lord never abandons his people.

In conclusion, as a Catholic community, we must treasure the power of prayer during these days: prayer for the world and its needs; prayer for our country at this

time of uncertainty and sickness; prayer for the families and communities to which we belong, not only in terms of health but also for the many concerns of livelihoods affected; prayer for ourselves.

*Merciful God,
come to the help of your people.
Be our shelter in this time of peril
and strengthen the bonds of our community.
Bring healing to all who suffer the ravages of disease
and assist those whose skill and art can put an end to this affliction.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Assuring you all of my prayers for you at this time and asking for your prayers for me and those who work with me for the good of the Archdiocese.

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ *Bernard*