

Guidance for the Celebration of Mass

Introduction

The Government has announced that from 4th July 2020, communal acts of worship will be allowed in our Catholic Churches. This guidance, issued by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for the Celebration of Mass, assumes that the general guidance published by the Conference, based on Government Guidance on the safe opening of Places of Worship for individual prayer, is in place.¹ In particular, the maximum safe operating capacity of the church, based on social distancing guidelines, should be clearly signposted at the door and the number and position within the church of people attending at any one time should be overseen by volunteer stewards.

Social Distancing - IMPORTANT

The Government maintains that the 2m social distancing requirements should be applied where possible. The Government has said is possible to go to "1m plus;" this means you can space people more closely (with a minimum of 1m) providing a mitigation of risk is also applied. In the case of our churches, this would mean the compulsory wearing of a face covering for members of the congregation.²

Worshippers should limit their interactions with anyone they are not attending church with, i.e. if they are attending corporate worship with one other household, wherever possible they should maintain social distancing with anyone outside of this group.³

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.

Face Coverings

Face coverings will be mandatory in Places of Worship from Saturday 8th August 2020. All those who are attending churches must wear a face covering unless they are exempt from doing so. This is for the good of all who gather in the Church for Mass as it is an enclosed public space where there are people from differing households who they do not normally meet.⁴ Priests in the sanctuary providing they are sufficiently distant (2m or more) from the congregation do not need to wear a face covering except when distributing Holy Communion (please see below). Other ministers in the sanctuary should wear face coverings and remain socially distant from the celebrant.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-easing-of-lockdown-restrictions-23-june-2020>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>

⁴ *You are also strongly encouraged to wear a face covering in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing may be difficult and where you come into contact with people you do not normally meet.* Taken from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

Celebration of Mass within Church Buildings

Before the Mass

Only those necessary should be in the sacristy before Mass. The celebrant, sacristan, or server should prepare everything for the celebration of Mass with care. Single-use gloves should be worn at this stage. Particular care should be taken over the preparation of the elements for Holy Communion. The altar breads for distribution to the people should be placed into a clean covered ciborium (a pall can be placed over a dish paten). Sufficient altar breads for each celebration should be placed within at this stage. A separate ciborium/paten should be prepared for each person who will distribute Holy Communion. The cover of the ciborium or dish paten should not be removed until the time for distribution of Holy Communion.

The priest should prepare his own chalice and paten with a large altar bread for consecration. The chalice should have a purificator and a pall. The purificator should be used only once and then laundered. He should prepare the cruets of wine and water and his own bowl for the lavabo. Again, the towel should be used only once and then laundered.

All hymnbooks and missals and other published material normally used by the congregation and not meant for single use should be removed from the church. The Holy Water stoups should be dry. Until further instruction is given on singing, there should be no congregational singing at Mass.

During the Mass

Any worship aids (missalettes etc.) should be for single use and taken with the user when the Mass ends. They should not be left in the church at the end of Mass.

Servers must wear face coverings whilst in the Sanctuary. Deacons should wear face coverings apart from the proclamation of the Gospel when he should remove the face covering at the lectern and replace it before moving away from it (providing the lectern is sufficiently distant from the congregation). The priest, and if present, deacon and server, should remain socially distant at all times on the sanctuary during the celebration of Mass. This is particularly important at the Gospel (for the deacon's blessing), the Preparation of the Gifts, and during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Readers should sanitise their hands before and after reading, or be supplied with single-use gloves, and should avoid touching the microphones or the Lectionary during the Liturgy of the Word, apart from page turning. **Readers may remove their face coverings at the lectern to read and should replace them before stepping away from it providing the lectern is sufficiently distant from the congregation.** The homily should be brief, to minimise the time that people are congregated in the church building. The Prayer of the Faithful should be omitted.

There should be no offertory procession of the gifts of bread and wine to the altar; the priest should have these on the credence table or the altar before Mass begins. There should be no sharing of the collection plate or bag. People should be encouraged to make their donation to the church online or via standing order. Plates or other collecting boxes for cash offerings should be placed at the entrances and exits of churches, and this should be overseen by stewards. The collection should be consolidated into plastic bags, sealed, placed into a secure location and left for 72 hours before counting. Counters should wear gloves when doing this task and the area should be well ventilated and cleaned before and afterwards.

The Communion Rite

Members of the congregation should not exchange the sign of peace.

After the prayer and its response “*Behold the Lamb of God...Lord I am not worthy,*” the priest should 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. The priest will need to explain this to the congregation at this point.

There are two options for the distribution of Holy Communion. In both cases, because the people have already acclaimed the presence of the Lord, at the Priest’s Communion, the People’s Communion is distributed in silence with no dialogue between minister and communicant. **The priest, and those who are distributing Holy Communion should wear face coverings when doing so.**

- Option 1

Once the priest has received Holy Communion, he should **put on his face covering and** cleanse his hands with alcohol sanitiser before opening the pre-prepared ciborium for the Communion of the people. If there is a deacon assisting, or any other Minister of Holy Communion, they should similarly cleanse their hands and then receive communion from the priest from the people’s ciborium, and under one kind only. They should then **put on their face coverings and** cleanse their hands again before receiving their ciborium from which they remove the covering or pall if it is still in place.

At the place where communion is to be distributed, a physical barrier should be placed, for example a prie-dieu (kneeler on the priest’s side) or small table to socially distance the priest distributing Holy Communion from communicants. Communion must be given silently in the hand only, with the communicant standing, and avoiding any physical contact. People should wait in their pews until instructed to move forward to the priest for Holy Communion by the Stewards, always aware of the regulations on social distancing in the orderly queue. When they approach the priest, they should do so with arms at “full stretch” so that there is a good distance between the priest and the communicant. Their hands, palms upwards, one of top of the other, should be extended as flatly as possible. **The communicant should unloop their face covering and consume the Sacred Host and then replace the face covering before moving back to their pews in an orderly manner.**

Once Communion is complete, the priest returns to the altar and places the unused Hosts, without touching them, into the Tabernacle, **he then can remove his face covering before** he cleanses the sacred vessels himself in the usual way.

- Option 2

The priest receives Holy Communion as described and immediately cleanses his paten and chalice. He then holds a reverent silence before the Prayer after Communion, giving the Blessing and dismissal. At this point, **the priest puts on his face covering, cleanses his hands with hand sanitiser and** the other Ministers of Holy Communion who will assist the priest come forward, cleanse their hands and receive Holy Communion under one kind. They should then **put on their face coverings and** cleanse their hands again before receiving their ciborium from which they remove the covering or pall if it is still in place. They then move to the points for distribution and communicants are stewarded forward in an orderly manner to receive Holy Communion as above, and then immediately leave the Church. The remaining Blessed Sacrament is placed into the Tabernacle, **the priest then can remove his face covering before** the vessels are cleansed in the usual way.

After the Celebration of Mass

The procession from the sanctuary at the end of the Mass should ensure good social distancing. The sanctuary party should return to the sacristy after Mass. If the clergy wish to greet the people, they should remove their vestments, **put on a face covering (if in church)** and not engage in any physical contact with parishioners, who should be encouraged to return home and not remain.

The celebrant should place the used altar linens into a receptacle for laundry. All sacred vessels should be washed in hot water with a little neutral soap and dried completely before storing. Any discarded printed materials should be removed and bagged for disposal.

The church should be closed after the Mass has finished in order to clean the space according to the Bishops' Conference guidelines on individual prayer. If there is cause for concern regarding the possible contamination of clerical vestments worn during the celebration of Mass, these should be washed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, using the warmest water setting allowed for the fabric and allowing time for them to dry completely.

Celebrations of Mass Outdoors

If there is space for the celebration of Mass outdoors around the Church, which allows for the social distancing guidelines of Government to be fulfilled, and that all of the above liturgical advice can be done safely, then there is no reason why Mass cannot be celebrated outside of a church within the boundary of the parish property. If a Catholic parish school or its grounds is to be used for Mass, a separate risk assessment has to be done, the appropriate school authority (Governing Body or Trust) has to give its permission, and both the parish and school insurers should be informed before the event takes place.

Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas
3rd August 2020
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