

Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic

Action Points Agreed by the Bishops for the Church in England & Wales

25 March 2020

Action Points

1. Live streaming of Mass

- Important that good social distancing is modelled in every live-streamed Mass.
- Continue to promote the live-streaming of Masses in churches and advertise the links so people can follow.
- Only those who live “on site” (eg in a presbytery) should be present at any live-streamed liturgy. People must not travel to these services to fulfil a supplementary role (eg. organist, cantor, server, reader etc). An exception is when a priest necessarily requires help to celebrate the Mass.
- In the light of the Decree of 25 March 2020, live-streamed Masses must not include concelebration.

2. Funerals – developments

- Guidance issued last week remains: no church services, graveside and cremation services only. The local guidance of crematorium and cemetery authorities must be followed.
- In conducting such prayers, priests must follow guidelines on social distancing.
- Given the possibility of increased use of crematoria at the peak of the pandemic, a list of least vulnerable priests or deacons will be drawn up to cover this situation.
- Coffins must not be taken to our churches for resting overnight before a committal as this will necessitate cleaning of the churches.
- After the pandemic, Masses *in memoriam* will be permitted in the presence of the ashes for those committed during this time.

3. Limitations on the Ministry of Priests

- In the absence of their regular routines, priests should devote themselves to the daily celebration of Mass, prayer, reading and keeping in contact with their people by telephone and internet.
- Visits to homes for *in extremis* celebrations of baptism and anointing of the dying are permitted, observing the necessary hygiene and distancing regulations. The anointing should follow Bishop Mason’s guidelines. Such ministry is considered an essential work, for which travel is justifiable.

- **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

In addition to the earlier guidance it is to be noted that confessions cannot be heard over the telephone. Services of General Absolution cannot be held as this involves travel and the gathering of people. Requests for individual confession may be difficult to meet, given the demands of social distancing and church closure. It is deemed reasonable for a priest to refuse a request for these reasons.

Further guidance on this Sacrament are given below in the context of Easter Duties.

- See note Easter Duties.
- 4. Support for Priests over 70/vulnerable priests – reception of specific visitors for support**
 - Any sacramental ministry requested of a priest over 70 or with underlying health conditions should be referred to a priest who is not in either of these categories.
 - 5. Hospital Chaplaincy**
 - Bishops might discuss with their lead hospital chaplain the possibility of a back-up list of priests for hospital work should regular hospital chaplains become ill.
 - 6. Church Finance – parish, diocesan**
 - It is important that each diocese looks at its own financial situation. Obvious prudential measures should be taken. There is the possibility of extending on-line giving and this is being looked into. In the meantime on your parish websites you might sensitively invite parishioner to save up their weekly contributions in reality or in the bank accounts to be payed over when the time comes.. The point can be well made that the only regular income to parishes is through the generosity of the Mass attending community. The same applies to the Diocese.

Holy Week

1. Decree of the CDW of 20 March 2020 – matters arising

a. Chrism Mass

- I have opted for the postponement of the Chrism Mass until such time that it can be celebrated by the Diocese. In the meantime the use of oils is going to be minimal and therefore there should be any supply issues or problem.
- A text is being prepared which will be circulated for clergy to be able to make a personal renewal of their priestly promises. This could be included in a live-streamed Mass, thereby being witnessed by some parishioners and inviting their prayer for all priests at this time.

b. Prayer resources for Holy Week for families and personal prayer

Magnificat for Holy Week has been recommended as an excellent resource. This is a supplement to the April edition and is available by mail order or by subscription. Many other resources are already available

c. Streaming of Watching on Holy Thursday

Further information will be circulated if there is any change from what is here:

A livestream from either the Cathedral or a Church with a centrally placed Tabernacle will take place on Holy Thursday for people to access after the Mass of Holy Thursday. Altars should not be stripped as part of the liturgy and should remain dressed if the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the Tabernacle, as per the Decree. There has been the suggestion that one of the countries' cathedrals be used for live-streaming as a focus for national coverage and prayer. More to follow.

d. Special intentions in the Universal Prayer of Good Friday:

These will be drafted and circulated once completed.

2. Additional Decree of 25 March 2020

This has been circulated from here to all parishes on Thursday 26th March . This decree has been issued by the highest authority in the Church. It must, therefore, be received with all seriousness by everyone under that authority.

The detailed provisions for the ceremonies of Holy Week are clear. They give detail to the outline instructions contained in the Decree 1, and the guidelines, as agreed by the Archbishops and Bishops, followed.

There is an important provision in this new decree which states that concelebration at Mass is to be avoided. The context of this is twofold: the spread of the Coronavirus in religious communities and the scientific evidence that the virus can be passed through the medium of the host, shared and handled by the concelebrating priests.

The authority of the document and the context of the decree mean that we must give this the utmost attention, religious communities, in particular, must be aware of its implications. It is also clear that no streamed celebration of Mass should include concelebrating priests. Priests who live in the same residence may, of course, be present together at one Mass if they so choose, observing the requirements of 'social distancing' (as laid down by HM Government), but the Rite of Holy Communion must reflect the provisions of this decree and the reasons for it.

3. Latin Mass Society – request for Triduum

Archbishop McMahon to ask the Warrington Parish run by the FSSP if they will live-stream EF Masses and the Easter Triduum.

4. Easter Duties

A note explicitly dispensing people from their Easter duties for the current circumstances and noting the efficacy of a perfect Act of Contrition is below.

5. Monastic and other Enclosed Communities

Please ensure that the provisions of hygiene and Communion as laid down in the Conference Call notes are strictly observed, together with the provisions of the Decree of 25 March 2020.

Dispensation from Easter Duties

In their letter of 18th March 2020, the President and the Vice-President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales said "*in these emergency circumstances, and for as long as they last, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is removed. This is, without doubt, the teaching of the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2181). This pandemic is the 'serious reason' why this obligation does not apply at this time.*"

Many of the faithful will be aware of their Easter Duties; that is to receive Holy Communion during the Easter Season and by custom, to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation beforehand. The Code of Canon Law (CIC 920) says *each of the faithful is obliged to receive holy communion at least once a year. This precept must be fulfilled during the Easter season unless it is fulfilled for a just cause at another time during the year.* The requirement for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation comes from the need to be in a state of grace to receive Holy Communion (CIC 916).

As it is not possible for the faithful to receive Holy Communion at this time, and into the future, the Bishops of England and Wales have dispensed the Easter Duties for the year 2020.

The Bishops have asked that all should make a Perfect Act of Contrition at this time. Perfect contrition (or a Contrition of Charity) is true and real sorrow for our sins which is created when we realise the immense love of God for each one of us. We express this contrition when we realise how we offend God by our sinful words, deeds and omissions in contrast to the immeasurable love and mercy that he continually shows us.

This requires us to be contrite of heart for what we have done, know and be overwhelmed by the love and mercy of God for his children, and to approach this grace with humility and resolution not to sin again.

An Act of Contrition

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Saviour Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.

+Peter

28th March 2020