

Guidance on preparing for the re-opening of Churches

This document has been drafted to provide guidance and support to clergy and parishioners as they prepare for the phased reopening of our parishes. The guidelines which follow reflect advice given in the Scottish Government's Route Map on the gradual removal of restrictions. Diocesan Coordinators for Reopening can be contacted for local help and guidance.

The obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains dispensed until further notice. The faithful are asked to consider carefully whether or not they should return in the early phases. Upholding the church's duty of care to elderly clergy, together with social distancing reductions in capacity, will mean that the availability of Mass is likely to be reduced in many areas and may not be available at all in some parishes. Each parish is asked to consider these guidelines to assist them in deciding the readiness of the parish as our country moves into each of the four phases of the route map.

Preparation for going to Church

1. It is possible to use the videos available online highlighting changes to our liturgical actions. (Look up YouTube for "Return to Mass".) Some dioceses/parishes have already created their own videos.
2. All churches should measure 2 metre squared distancing spaces to estimate the number of people permitted in the church at any one given time.
3. In some parishes, where demand for places exceeds the restricted capacity of the church, it may be advisable to introduce a booking system for places at Mass (either online or by phone). Please see the suggestions for online platforms that are suitable for this.
4. Parishioners who are shielding according to Scottish Government guidance should not come to church until Scottish Government guidance advises them it safe to do so. Parishioners aged 70 or over, pregnant women, and those who receive the flu jab for medical reasons are currently able to leave their homes for essential purposes. In making a decision to come to church they are asked to follow Scottish Government advice.
5. Improved cleaning will occur in churches, but no one should expect that they will be any safer from germs than other public spaces. There remains a risk for anyone who attends a public Mass. Even with best health practices and strict social distancing, anyone who enters a public space should recognise there is a risk of contracting the coronavirus.
6. Everyone should wear a face-covering.
7. Those entering the Church will be required to use sanitising gel on their hands to reduce the risk of contaminating surfaces. They should also sanitise their hands on leaving.
8. Volunteers will be required to act as passkeepers leading people to/from their seats.
9. Parishioners are asked to arrive early so seating may proceed smoothly.

10. There may be some pews where household groups can sit together.
11. Some churches may require to place a partition in the porch for entrance and exit. Not all side doors are suitable for use as an exit.
12. Each Church will only be able to open according to the number and availability of volunteers.
13. If a parish priest has worries or questions regarding the possibility of reopening, he should contact the designated co-ordinator in the diocese to discuss these concerns.

Liturgical Guidelines for Holy Mass

Recognising that the virus is predominantly contagious through the breathing in of air droplets, these guidelines are based on the need to reduce the length of time when parishioners are together. These are tentative steps for returning to Mass and may be reviewed at any time.

1. The priest should set-up for Mass on his own with nobody in the sacristy unless the sacristan is part of the parish household.
2. All sacred vessels should be placed on the sanctuary by the priest or sacristan if he/she is free from the virus.
3. There should be no altar servers unless the server is part of the parish household.
4. Singing of Mass parts and hymns may be omitted.
5. Both the Gloria and the Creed may be omitted.
6. At Sunday Mass the second reading may be omitted.
7. The sermon should be brief.
8. The offertory procession is not required.
9. In place of the words "Body of Christ" for each communicant, before the Celebrant receives Holy Communion, he may say the words ***May the Body and Blood of Christ keep us all safe to eternal life,*** to which the congregation responds ***Amen.***
10. In accordance with the national protocol on Infection Control, it is recommended that Holy Communion be received in the hand for the duration of the pandemic.
11. The communicant should extend his/her hands to receive the host and then step two paces to the side in order to place the host on the tongue.
12. Holy Communion may be distributed after the Final Prayer. Parishioners may be directed to leave the Church immediately after receiving Holy Communion.
13. The collection may be taken as the parishioners exit the church. If there are two collections, one may also be taken as parishioners enter the church.
14. Where clergy are in the shielded group i.e. suffering from an underlying medical condition, they should not celebrate Mass. A substitute priest may assist if possible.
15. Deacons may assist at Mass in accordance with the National Guidelines and after conversation with the parish priest.

Proposed Schedule for Opening of Churches

The opening of Churches will depend on the availability of trained volunteers and of PPE etc. and will accord with the Scottish Government's Route Map. Whilst all dioceses are encouraged to follow the same timeline, it is recognised that not every parish may not be ready to open at the same time. So, the timeline will be adapted to the needs of the particular parish and every support will be offered to them by the diocese. In parishes with more than one church, it may be sufficient to open just one church.

The obligation to celebrate Sunday Mass is dispensed until further notice.

Phase 1

Churches remain closed

Phase 2

1. **Churches** are invited to open for personal prayer on the first Sunday on moving into Phase 2. It may be appropriate to celebrate this first step with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction. Where churches can reopen, it may be necessary to open for a suitable period of time with designated time slots for parishioners to book. Churches which are not yet able to open are invited to do so when the health and safety requirements of the Protocol are in place.
2. **Requiem Masses** may begin now whenever volunteers and PPE are in place and parish priests judge it appropriate to do so. The number of mourners should be limited according to government guidelines. Holy Communion may be received by the mourners according to the Protocol advice. The coffin should remain on a trolley at all times.
3. **2nd Sunday** may be a day of personal prayer identical to previous Sunday. This gives time to continually assess this first stage.
4. **Churches** may open during the week at specified times for personal prayer, according to the needs and practicalities of each parish.
5. **3rd Sunday** may be a day of personal prayer identical to previous Sunday. This gives us time to continually assess this first stage.

Phase 3

1. **Saturday/Sunday after moving into Phase 3:** If the Scottish Government gives the green light for moving into Phase 3 of the Route Map, parishes may celebrate Holy Mass on Saturday/Sunday of that weekend. Celebrating the Mass over two days gives each parish the opportunity to enable as many parishioners as possible to participate safely in the first Holy Eucharist since lockdown. Celebrating over two days also allows some clergy to supply for others who cannot celebrate Mass. Times of Masses could be scheduled accordingly. It is recognised that not all parishes may be ready to recommence Mass at this point.

2. **2nd and 3rd Sundays of Phase 3:** Having assessed the previous weekend, parishes may celebrate Holy Mass on Saturday/Sunday of the following weekends according to the judgement of the parish priest and parishioners in accordance with the Protocol.
3. **Weekday Mass** may now be celebrated, according to the needs and practicalities of each parish.

Phase 4

1. **Saturday/ Sunday after moving into Phase 4:** Each parish may revise their Mass schedule, having reviewed the needs of the parish during the previous phases.

The staged process of opening the churches and celebrating Holy Mass will allow each parish to assess its needs and make appropriate changes if required. These guidelines and timeline are provided as an aid to parishes. Not all parish communities may judge themselves ready to move forward at the same pace. Any questions that arise may be addressed to the diocesan coordinator for the reopening of churches.

Celebration of other Sacraments

Confession: The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is left to the discretion of the parish priest, mindful of the safe distancing required between the priest and the penitent which may include a partition. Confessional boxes should not be used during this period because airflow is poor in a small, enclosed space. Confessions could be held in a larger room with a screen to provide anonymity.

Baptism: Should a request be made for the celebration of Baptism during phase 2/3/4, please be aware of Scottish Government guidelines for a restricted number of participants. Contact should be minimal with the child and parents/godparents, respecting safe distancing and the use of cotton wool for anointing.

Marriages: The celebration of weddings during phase 2/3/4 should respect Scottish Government guidelines for safe distancing and limiting the numbers of participants, appropriate to each phase of the Route Map.