



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF  
ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON

## Safe Opening of Churches

The Government has confirmed that there will be no blanket closure of places of worship. The latest guidance states: “Places of worship play an important role in providing spiritual leadership for many individuals, and in bringing communities and generations together. However, their communal nature also makes them places that are particularly vulnerable to the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).”

Research to date indicates that the new virus variant is as well controlled by social distancing and mitigations as the old. Local Authorities can enforce closure in particular circumstances where there is evidence of lack of Covid security or ask for places of worship to close in response to rising local infection levels.

Each place of worship should evaluate their own local situation and examine all factors that could affect the good Covid security demonstrated by places of worship so far. This is to include (but is not limited to):

- a. Sufficient stewarding and management of the venue.
- b. Sufficient cleaning after acts of communal worship.
- c. Maintaining good social distancing (ideally 2 metres between households) along with good ventilation.
- d. Factors affecting travel to and from the place of worship, such as public transport.
- e. The length of exposure time for an act of worship is critical and should be minimised – anything that is not necessary should be omitted.
- f. Those who have gathered for worship should not mingle before or after the service outside of the church. They should disperse immediately.
- g. All non-essential worship should be postponed or cancelled (see further guidance below)

**If you consider that the time has come to close your church because the conditions for opening cannot be met, or you have to self-isolate for any reason, please contact Bishop Richard.**

Please be reminded that, in order to maintain Covid safety, liturgies should not be prolonged. 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. Please remember that incense should not be used at present, and singing should be avoided (see further guidance below). Members of the congregation should continue to wear face coverings (unless exempt), to use hand sanitiser when entering and leaving the church and maintain social distancing. When visiting a place of worship, people should avoid travelling outside their local area.

# Covid-19 Updated Guidance for Churches

Places of Worship Guidance was updated on 11th January and can be found here:

<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-from-2-december>

The general approach of the guidance is an extension of the previous rules in place under Tier 4 in December. However, it has been amended to reflect the new national restrictions. These restrictions:

- require people to stay at home, except for specific purposes;
- prevent people gathering with those they do not live with, except for specific purposes;
- require certain businesses to close.

**Attending a place of worship is one of the very few legal exemptions that allow larger numbers to gather in the same venue.** To keep everyone safe, where places of worship choose to open it is crucial that those attending comply with the law and COVID-19 Secure guidance.

The following activities should not take place at the present time:

1. Baptisms or other ceremonies which mark significant life cycle moments but which do not take place as an established part of normal communal worship (with the exception of commemorative events that celebrate the life of a person who has died – see the detailed guidance on this in the full document).
2. Prayer or study groups in person.
3. Lifestyle and leisure/recreational groups such as craft groups or exercise groups.
4. Amateur choir practice or group bell ringing.
5. Tourism and shops contained within the place of worship.

In addition to this summary, there are other key changes:

1. Revised wording on weddings to highlight the consideration that is required from those participating about whether the circumstance is exceptional in order to proceed at this time.
2. National guidance strongly suggests that singing should only take place where it is essential to the act of worship. **Since every effort should be made not to lengthen the time for Mass unnecessarily, it will be appropriate for the time being not to have music at Mass or any other liturgy.** This includes recorded music, if it extends the time taken for the celebration.