



18 March 2020

Cessation of Public Acts of Worship

Dear Father,

The Bishops' Conference has today agreed that all public acts of worship in churches will cease as of the evening of Friday 20th March. This includes all public Masses. This decision will be reviewed regularly, but I would ask that all parishes and chaplaincies follow this directive until further notice. This is not a decision which is taken lightly, but it is one which we believe is in the best interests of all the faithful, in light of government guidance. The obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days is removed for as long as this crisis continues.

It would be worth placing a clear notice on the church door saying that public Mass is not being celebrated. Where it is possible churches should be left open, especially on Sundays, for private prayer. Where it is not possible to leave churches open for long periods, then perhaps you could arrange for the church to be open at specific times so that people have the opportunity for prayer in church. The notice could also give details in this regard. There is obviously a need to maintain social distancing on entering the church.

Private Sunday and daily Mass should continue, but this should not involve the presence of a deacon or any members of the lay faithful. Some Masses will be streamed live online, and a list of all those Masses which will be streamed online will be made available shortly.

I have attached to this letter a statement from Cardinal Nichols and myself, as well as a document on liturgical advice. This latter document will cover guidance on baptisms, confessions, first reconciliation and Holy Communion, confirmation, matrimony, anointing of the sick, receptions into the Church, and funerals. Please read this document. I would like this guidance to be followed.

At this time, it is important that we maintain links with our parishioners, where possible, especially the most vulnerable. In many cases this will have to be done by way of telephone. You may want to establish a group of volunteers to help, but I would stress that government guidance on social distancing and hygiene should be followed at all times.

It is also important that we have measures in place for our clergy who are seventy or over, or who have health conditions which make them more vulnerable. A meeting is taking place today and this will be on the agenda.

The Bishops' Conference will be issuing prayer resources (including prayers for making acts of spiritual communion) for this time. I am also arranging for prayer resources to be produced for our archdiocese. I will issue a pastoral letter, in addition to the one for this weekend, in the next couple of days.

As ever, I am very grateful for everything that you do for your parishes. This is certainly a strange time that we are living in, but our life and communion together in the Lord will continue in these new and different ways. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Archbishop's House. I would also like to repeat that, if any of you have to self-isolate and find yourself in difficulty, please get in touch and we can help.

With my ongoing prayers that you stay safe and healthy.

Yours sincerely,

+ Malachy