



RETURN TO THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS IN OUR CHURCHES.

Dear Father,

You will have received a copy of the recent Framework Document published by the Irish Bishops' Conference titled: "**Framework Document for a Return to the Public Celebration of Mass and the Sacraments**". The document is meant to assist parishes to prepare for this event which is scheduled for June 29th. The document checklists outline the practical steps that need to be taken at this time.

I outline here certain key aspects of the Framework Document that I ask you and your **Parish Support Group** to put in place. I will deal with further aspects over the coming weeks.

Church personnel should, at all times, follow the most up-to-date public health advice and associated regulations, particularly in regard to limitations on gatherings, the requirements of social (physical distancing), hygiene and sanitation measures and the use of personal protective equipment as appropriate.

Beginnings

1. **Establish**, in consultation with the Parish Pastoral Group / Council, **A PARISH SUPPORT GROUP** of parishioners and staff who will be able to implement the Framework Document in the circumstances of your parish. It is important to remember that the "Return to Work Safety Protocol" published by the Government is a statutory requirement and applies to all parishes.
2. **The tasks of the Parish Support Group are as follows:**
 - Reflect on how to enlist volunteers to assist with the re-opening, i.e. recruit, where possible, parishioners with a background in health care /public health care, hygiene management, those who have experience of stewarding gatherings and those who can help communicate the arrangements for Masses etc.
 - A risk assessment of your church(es) and sacrist(ies) should be carried out by this support team.
 - Devise a plan, applicable to each church in the parish, to allow for safe queueing prior to entry, movement of people within the church and the distribution of Holy Communion in a safe manner for all. Please arrange for appropriate signage which clearly indicates how this will work.
 - Identify how people with a physical disability will be facilitated (possibly accompanied by a carer or a support person).

- Initially, in a parish with more than one church, consider whether it might be more effective, in terms of facilitating numbers and maintaining hygiene, to celebrate Mass in the largest Church for the foreseeable future. This is a matter for the Parish Support Group. There should be no multiplication of Masses.
- Plan to have one or more supervised boxes at the entrances of the Church for the contribution envelopes/cash offerings to avoid the need for people to pass collection baskets or bags.

Install dispensers for sanitising gel at entrances, the sanctuary, as well as toilet facilities and sacristies. Aim, where possible, to avoid “pinch-points” in particular, at exits by asking the congregation to leave in stages / small groups.

3. Cocooning

Many parish volunteers, lay ministers, priests and religious are included among those who have been cocooning. The Department of Health strongly recommends that people who are over 70 or have a condition which makes them medically vulnerable should stay at home as much as possible.

Priests

A priest in this category, in good health and after consultation with his GP, may resume the public celebration of Mass - careful to observe all the hygiene and distancing requirements.

It is advisable that priests with serious underlying medical conditions should exercise great caution and should only engage in public services with the agreement of their GPs.

If some priests are unable to celebrate public Mass it will be necessary to coordinate with priests in neighbouring parishes.

4. Congregation

1. The dispensation from the Sunday and Holyday obligation is extended for the time being.
2. The Parish Support Group determines the number of available or “open” pews/benches in the Church(es) of the parish for any mass and in turn calculate how many people may be able to facilitate at each Mass, keeping in mind that members of one household can sit together.
3. It is preferable to manage expectations in advance, rather than to be turning people away. People from townlands, station areas or housing estates could come to a designated Mass on a particular day. In such a way that everyone can come at least once every few weeks on Sunday. Spread participation across the full week. Take into account the potential impact on capacity of memorial Masses, anniversary Masses etc. Devise and communicate a plan that suits your parish.
4. Hymnals and missalettes normally made available in the Church should not be used for the foreseeable future due to contamination concerns.

5. LITURGICAL GUIDELINES

1. Access to the Sacristy should be limited to the sacristan, the celebrant and concelebrating clergy. A maximum capacity for the Sacristy should be determined and indicated. Booking of Masses etc should be done by telephone or email.
2. A simple entrance and recessional, rather than a procession through the Church, is recommended at this time.
3. Concelebration should be limited, and concelebrants should receive Holy Communion under both species using separate chalices or by intinction.
4. The sanctuary area should be arranged in such a way that those who have a liturgical role can exercise that role while respecting the required physical distance.
5. The priest celebrant and other ministers should not wear masks or gloves while in the sanctuary but should simply remain at the required physical distance from the congregation and each other during the entirety of the Mass. The priest/minister should wear protective face-covering for the distribution of Holy Communion.
6. Rather than an Offertory Procession, the gifts of bread and wine should be brought by the celebrant from a credence table, placed near the altar, which will also hold the water bowl and finger towel.
7. If hosts for the communion of the faithful are to be consecrated, they should be placed on a second corporal towards the side of the altar, in order to avoid the possibility of contamination. It is good practice to consecrate at each Mass a sufficient number of hosts for that celebration only.
8. At this time, the optional exchange of the Sign of Peace should be omitted.
9. The rite of blessing and sprinkling of water and the distribution of blessed water is suspended for the time being.
10. Care should be taken to thoroughly clean all vessels and to change purificators and finger towels after each Mass

Please Note

The date set for the return to the celebration of public Mass is June 29th. However, if you and your Parish Support Group deem it wise to wait in order to put all the necessary requirements in place please do so. It is wise to ensure that all requirements are met before opening for Masses.

I would like to emphasise that a key component of the work of your Parish Support Group is to keep parishioners informed of the arrangements that you have put in place to ensure their safety.

My thanks to you and to all the volunteers in our churches who will play an important role in ensuring the safety of all who will come to Mass.

Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly

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