

## PREPARING TO OPEN CHURCHES FOR INDIVIDUAL/PRIVATE PRAYERS

[first guidelines from the diocese]

**The Government has yet to let us know when churches will be allowed to open. However, the following guidelines will help us prepare for when this time comes. A Risk Assessment will be sent to parishes next week so that we can have some idea of how many churches will initially be allowed to open their doors to parishioners in our Archdiocese during the initial phase.**

The first phase of opening will allow for private prayer only.

Every parish will be asked to complete a Risk Assessment which will be copied to the relevant area bishop/episcopal vicar and the Property Department. A church will only be able to open during this first phase if the parish can successfully manage all the necessary measures which need to be put in place as outlined in the 'Guidance on Re-opening of Catholic Churches for Individual Prayer' document.

Any parish which cannot put in place the necessary requirements, for whatever reasons, is not obliged to open. Opening the church will be a matter for local determination on the basis of capacity to fulfil the requirements. This decision will be communicated to the Archdiocese via the Risk Assessment. There will be full support from the Archdiocese for any parish that does not feel able to open its church in the first phase.

The requirements state that parishes will need to provide volunteers who oversee the opening of churches with suitable protective equipment. Please read the document attached entitled Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which gives details of the hand sanitiser, masks, and gloves, which are being bulk purchased by the Archdiocese and made available for parishes that need them. With regard to the cleaning of the church buildings, normal household cleaning materials, available from supermarkets, are sufficient.

The Risk Assessment will allow a decision to be made not only on whether a parish can open, but for how many days each week, and how many hours each day. In this first phase, churches will not be open for the celebration of Mass or any of the Sacraments, but purely for individual prayer.

There can be no timetabled or group events in churches. This means there cannot be meetings of prayer groups, communal rosary, or Benediction.

Nothing which encourages a crowd to gather at a specific time is allowed. The Blessed Sacrament may be exposed, but only during the time whilst the church is open until it closes, and only for silent, personal prayer, as if one were paying a visit to pray before the Tabernacle.

In this first phase it is not permissible to hear confessions in church, although provision for confession on request may take place outdoors, providing the confidentiality of the sacramental encounter is preserved. There can be no times for confession published, or for any other events which will lead people to gather or form a queue indoors.