

Bishops' Conference of Scotland

Updated Covid Advice for Parishes from BCOS Infection Control Group

10th August 2021

Responsibility and Respect for Others in the Body of Christ

A short guide for parishes beyond Level Zero

On Monday 9th August the Scottish Government lifted almost every restriction that has shaped parish life since March 2020. What does this mean for your parish? The government guidance continues to promote the following:

- maintaining good hand hygiene- everyone should sanitise their hands on entering and leaving the Church
- practising respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette
- wearing face coverings
- ensuring there is good ventilation – open windows and doors during Masses and between Masses to enable a stream of fresh air to pass through the building. Fire doors should remain closed.
- continuing to engage with Test and Protect and self-isolate when symptomatic or have tested positive. It may be sufficient for the parish to keep a register of those who go to the same Mass most Sundays or weekdays, and ask a parishioner who decides to go to another Mass for a particular reason to inform the parish. It will not be necessary to book for Mass nor for a steward to register names of parishioners who enter the Church. Any visitors to a parish should be asked to leave their details at the end of Mass by a short announcement from the parish priest.

We are all aware of our responsibilities to one another as members of the Body of Christ. It is true that some parishioners may not have the confidence to return to Church immediately. In order to facilitate the return of parishioners who are worried about the virus, those seated should maintain a respectful distance from one another or one family from another. Parishes may provide simple cards with “Please respect my space” which people can pick up on entry to church and put beside them so that a space can be left to allow for distancing and raise awareness.

Cleaning and Ventilation of Churches

As evidence has accumulated over the course of the pandemic, scientific understanding about the virus has changed. Studies and investigations of outbreaks all point to the majority of transmissions occurring as a result of infected people spewing out large droplets and small particles called aerosols when they cough, talk or breathe. These can be directly inhaled by people close by. Surface transmission, although possible, is not thought to be a

significant risk. Excessive attention on making surfaces pristine takes up limited time and resources that would be better spent on ventilation or the decontamination of the air that people breathe. Hand washing and sanitising is useful because surface transmission can't be ruled out. But it's more important to improve ventilation systems or to install air purifiers than to sterilize surfaces. If we've already paid attention to the air and we have some extra time and resources, wiping down those high-touch surfaces could be helpful. In this case it may be easier and sufficient for some parishes to distribute an anti-bacterial wipe at the end of Mass and ask the parishioner to wipe down any surfaces touched by that parishioner. Other parishes may find it easier to maintain their cleaning regimes at present. Parishioners should also be reminded not to touch their faces with their hands as this is a common source of transmission.

In preparation for colder weather in the autumn parishioners should dress appropriately so that ventilation can be maintained in the Church. Extractor fans which draw in fresh air are helpful. Fans or heating systems which recycle the air within the Church building should not be used during Mass.

Liturgical Questions

Holy water stoops should not be used. The use of the rite of Asperges- blessing with Holy Water may be encouraged more often as part of the Penitential Rite.

Holy Communion should remain under one kind only. Reception of Holy Communion should remain on the hand. If a parish priest feels confident to permit Holy Communion to be received on the tongue, he should do so after Mass when other parishioners have left the church. The parishioner who in conscience desires Holy Communion on the tongue should be made aware that he or she is increasing the risk of transmission to the priest and other parishioners if they are still in the church building by removing their face mask. Hence, the reason to wait till after Mass.

A one way system to restrict the movement of parishioners is no longer required and Holy Communion should be received during the Mass as normal.

Offertory collection and procession may be reinstated but online and contactless giving would be preferred.

The physical 'Sign of Peace' is still not allowed at this time.

Votive candles may be used with caution paying attention to the fact that hand sanitiser may be highly flammable. Some Churches already have candles placed on stands to be lit with a disposable taper.

Hymn books and newsletters may be used- again surface transmission is not thought to be a problem on these objects.

The use of enclosed spaces for Confession should be discouraged.

Assembling at entrances and exits should be avoided.

If a parishioner visits the Church outside of Mass for personal prayer he/she should wipe down any surfaces touched, and sanitise hands on entry and exit.