**Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois**

**Mass and Public Celebration of the Sacraments**

(Phase Four from 20th July 2020)

**Mass and Public Celebration of the Sacraments**

A maximum of 50 people may gather in a church while observing the social distance of 2 metres. The exception is very large churches, with much greater capacity. More than 50 can assemble provided the congregation is divided into defined sections of no more than 50 people, observing the social distance of 2 metres and each section 4 metres from the next, each with a separate entrance and exit. Smaller churches remain unaffected because social distancing means fewer than 50 can be accommodated. See HSE document “Covid-19 for Religious Services, 8 July 2020”.

The guidance issued in the Bishops’ Framework Document applies, including careful hand sanitising, signage, social distancing of 2 metres, avoiding handshaking as a sign of peace and Holy Communion distributed on the hand only, with celebrant and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion wearing face coverings. Please consult the Framework Document for details.

In Phase Four, from 20th July, the indoor maximum, with social distancing, was expected to increase to 100, this has not happened, it remains at 50, with the exception as outlined above

Members of the same household may sit together in the same seat but 2 metres from everyone else. For overall numbers the household is not counted as one unit.

**Anointing of the Sick**

1. The anointing of the sick will be celebrated when the pastoral need arises, and when the priest has been invited by the sick person, by family members or by emergency personnel.
2. If the sick person is in a nursing home or hospital then the protocols of the institution should be followed.
3. The sick person will be anointed by the priest without any direct physical contact, and using a cotton bud. Hand sanitising and wearing a face covering are essential.
4. If Covid-19 is suspected then HSE guidance should be obtained before any pastoral visit can take place.

**First Friday Visits**

First Friday Visits resume in August

1. All First Friday Visits must follow public health guidelines.
2. First Friday Visits take place **when the parishioner and / or family invites the priest to call**. Please indicate this in your newsletter or website.
3. If the priest is vulnerable or has been cocooning he should give careful consideration to whether he should conduct such visits. It may be advisable for him to arrange for another priest to carry out an exceptional pastoral visit.
4. When visiting a house the priest should use a face covering and sanitise his hands before and after the visit and be seen to do so.
5. Priests should be aware that movement from house to house may increase risk and so the sanitisation of hands should be rigorously observed.
6. It may be necessary to stagger visits over several days.

Other than visiting those who are ill it is recommended that general parish visitation should not resume at this time.

**Confirmation**

Each parish may decide on the most suitable time to celebrate Confirmation. It is recommended that Confirmation ceremonies should be completed by the end of September. In some cases candidates in Fifth Class may prefer to wait until next year; this can be decided locally.

The Bishop will delegate priests to administer the sacrament of Confirmation in their parishes.

The official regulations regarding mass gatherings indoors, social distancing and hand sanitisation should be followed. The Confirmation ceremony can take place outside of Mass. Depending on the number of candidates, social distancing and the size of the church; several ceremonies may be necessary.

The celebrant should wear a face covering during the anointing and the sacrament should be administered using one cotton bud for each candidate. Cotton buds should be to be disposed of safely i.e. burned or kept in a plastic bag for at least 72 hours before being disposed of in general waste.

Please note that in Phase Four, starting on 20th July, the maximum allowed inside has not been raised to 100, it remains at 50, with social distancing applied. The one exception is very large churches where many more than 50 can be accommodated. This must be carried out by dividing the congregation into defined sections of no more than 50 people, socially distanced, with each section 4 meters apart. People from the same household may sit together.

**First Holy Communion**

Each parish may decide on the most suitable date for First Holy Communion.

**Baptisms**

Baptisms may be celebrated under the following conditions:

1. The number present is determined by the social distancing measure of 2 metres. In large churches, having a capacity for many more than 50, more than one baptism may take place with participants and guests, observing social distance and in clearly identifiable and defined sections 4 metres apart;
2. The celebrant should wear a face covering;
3. No physical contact should be made in marking with the Sign of the Cross;
4. Anointing with oil should only carried out using a cotton bud and there should be no physical contact;
5. Water should be used from a jug, not a font;
6. Hand sanitiser should be available;
7. Social distancing should be maintained, except for the brief moments when the celebrant must approach the candidate for Baptism and;
8. The area of the church used for the Baptism must be cleaned / sanitised before and after each ceremony;
9. People from the same household may sit together but 2 metres from everyone else.

**Marriages**

Marriage ceremonies may be rescheduled, with agreement, up to 6 months from the original date.

The following conditions apply:

1. The number present is determined by the social distancing measure of 2 metres and the size of the church.   From 20th July, in all churches, the number present should not exceed 50. (This figure may need to be confirmed with the Registrar);
2. Social distancing should be maintained. Members of the same household may sit together but 2 meters from other people;
3. The protocols for Mass should be followed;
4. The area of the church used for the wedding must be cleaned / sanitised before and after the ceremony.

**Funerals**

1. The number present is determined by the social distancing measure of 2 metres. The total number present should not exceed 50. In the case of very large churches it should not exceed 50 per separate section;
2. Social distancing of 2 metres should be maintained;
3. The protocols for Mass should be followed;
4. The area of the church used for the funeral must be cleaned / sanitised before and after the funeral.

Please note that guidelines may change at short notice.

Ends: