

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

### **When will my local church re-open?**

The Diocese has undertaken a phased approach to re-opening its churches. All churches in our Diocese must go through an extensive process that involves a deep clean, risk assessment, and the recruitment of volunteers. Once a church has completed this work, the parish priest is then able to decide on how and when the church will reopen. Further information about the re-opening of churches is available on the Diocesan website at [www.rcdhn.org.uk](http://www.rcdhn.org.uk), and on Facebook and Twitter.

### **How can I find out about future announcements?**

To ensure you do not miss any of our future announcements, please sign up to our Diocesan eNewsletter [here](#).

### **I'm unable to attend church, what can I do?**

We are continuing to broadcast services and share prayer resources online at [www.rcdhn.org.uk](http://www.rcdhn.org.uk). For those who do not have access to the internet, a free postal "Ring a Prayer Resource" has been created, contact 07375934713 for more information. Or alternatively, a Mass by Phone service, provided by the Diocese of Middlesbrough, is available at 01642 130120.

### **What do I need to do to protect myself when I go to church?**

Churches have been following HM Government regulations and advice as well as guidance received from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. When attending church a volunteer steward will outline to you the main protocols in place to keep you safe. You will be asked to sanitise your hands on entering and leaving the church. All those attending church must wear a face covering unless they are exempt from doing so. A volunteer steward will show you to an allocated socially distanced seat so that you can keep sufficient space between yourself and other parishioners. Our parishes are being encouraged to register a QR code for the church venue. This works alongside the NHS Covid-19 app which you may wish to download before you attend.

### **How do the Government local restrictions affect our churches?**

In all tiers places of worship can remain open and public worship can continue. However, in tier 1 when meeting or mingling with friends and family you do not live with (or have formed a support bubble with) you must not meet in a group of more than 6, indoors or outdoors. This includes places of worship. In areas subject to Tier 2 and Tier 3 restrictions, you must not meet or mingle with friends and family indoors in any setting, including a place of worship, unless they are part of your household or support bubble. In all instances you must remain socially distant from anyone you do not live with (or have formed a support bubble with).

### **Can I attend church as part of a 'Christmas Bubble'?**

If you do not live in a tier 4 area, you may see a maximum of two other households (your 'Christmas bubble') on Christmas Day. You cannot see anyone from a Tier 4 area. You may also attend a place of worship with members of your Christmas bubble. Please [click here](#) to find guidance on making a Christmas bubble.

### **How long can I stay in church for individual prayer?**

To ensure fairness for all, we ask that you display consideration for others who may be waiting to enter the church.

### **Can prayer groups now meet in person?**

Prayer groups can meet in numbers greater than six providing that the church or meeting space has been risk assessed and controls put in place to ensure that it is 'COVID secure'.

People must follow the restrictions on social mixing set out by their area's COVID Local Alert Level (Tier) and adhere to social distancing between households.

However, it should be noted that HM Government guidance states:

*"However, for activities and social groups where there is a significant likelihood of groups mixing and socialising (and where it will be difficult to prevent mingling and therefore breaking the law) should not take place in a community facility."*

This guidance should be taken into consideration when developing the activity specific risk assessment for the prayer group meeting.

### **Can singing take place?**

Professional and amateur choirs may perform in any indoor venue or outdoors in any venue permitted to open. Based on public health advice for indoor performances, the audience or congregation should not participate in any activity that can create aerosols, including singing, shouting and chanting. Where a performance is held outdoors, an audience or congregation may join in with singing and should follow performing arts guidance.

### **Can music be played in church?**

Where music plays a big part in worship, and recordings are available, we suggest you consider using these as an alternative to live singing to mitigate risks.

Any instrument played during worship should be cleaned thoroughly before and after use. Avoid playing music at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult or that may encourage shouting when people will be trying to converse before or after worship.

### **What are the current capacity limits in church for weddings and funerals?**

As from 28<sup>th</sup> September HM Government guidance states that marriage ceremonies are limited to 15 people. Funerals continue to be limited to 30 people. People attending must remain physically distant from people outside their household or support bubble.

### **What are the current capacity limits in church for Baptism?**

If a Baptism takes place during a Parish Mass, the number of people attending will be limited to the secure capacity determined by the COVID-19 risk assessment for the church building. People attending must remain within their groups of 6 and observe strict social distancing between each separate group.

If a Baptism takes place outside of this normal pattern of worship, the numbers attending this celebration is limited to 6.

**What are the current capacity limits in church for 'Life Cycle' Events?**

As celebrations of First Holy Communion, Confirmation or the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults take place during a Parish Mass, the number of people attending will be limited to the secure capacity determined by the COVID-19 risk assessment for the church building. People attending must remain physically distant from people outside their household or support bubble.

First Reconciliation does not take place during a Parish Mass and therefore the numbers attending would be limited to 6.

**Can sacramental preparation meetings take place in church?**

Catechetical activities such as sacramental preparation sessions are not considered as being affected by the Rule of Six, as these are formal Religious Education and Formation sessions. At this time our churches which have re-opened have been risk assessed for the activity of worship. It would be possible to hold sacramental preparation meetings in church provided that a risk assessment specific for that activity has been completed. It would also be possible to use a parish hall or other meeting space provided that location was deemed 'COVID secure'. It would be good practice to have fixed groups of children and there must always be two adults present both of whom must have a diocesan DBS certificate. However, HM Government continues to recommend that where meetings can take place digitally without the need for face-to-face contact, they should continue to do so.