

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What changes have been made to our COVID-19 protocols following HM Government's announcement about Step 4 of the COVID-19 Roadmap effective from 19th July?

Bishop Robert Byrne CO, in consultation with the Episcopal Council, has taken both Clergy and Lay advice with regard to HM Government's announcement about Step 4 of the COVID-19 Roadmap. Due to the very high infection rates across all areas of the Diocese, Bishop Robert has asked that Clergy retain all of the COVID control measures and cleaning protocols that they are currently following in all of our churches and church halls until at least the end of August 2021. In September there will be a review of available data and guidance to allow further decisions to be made regarding controls and protocols.

It is however now possible to celebrate Life Cycle Events with numbers up to the safe capacity of the church as identified by the site specific risk assessment.

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

If you are attending church you may be asked to book a place in advance or to sign in when you arrive at the church. A volunteer steward may outline to you the main protocols in place to keep you safe. You are 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. You should remain physically distant from people outside your household or support bubble. A volunteer steward may 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 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 and sacramental preparation meetings now take place in person?

Prayer groups and sacramental preparation meetings can meet in numbers up to the COVID secure capacity of the church providing that the church or meeting space has been risk assessed and controls put in place to ensure that it is 'COVID secure'.

Please contact Michael McElroy at michael.mcelroy@diocesehn.org.uk who will be able to assist in preparing this activity specific risk assessment.

Can singing take place?

- **Indoors:** single small group of singers will be allowed to perform, or rehearse for performance, only where essential to an act of communal worship. This should be limited to as few singers as possible, with social distancing being maintained at all times. Communal singing should not take place.
- **Outdoors:** in the grounds or the outside space of a place of worship: when communal worship takes place outdoors, the congregation may join in with singing, and should follow the principles set out in the performing arts guidance. This includes ensuring that congregation members follow social distancing rules. Social contact limits apply, meaning that participating groups must not mingle. Communal singing in other public open spaces should not take place.

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 Life Cycle events including weddings, funerals, baptisms, First Holy Communion, Confirmation or the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults?

From 19th July all Life Cycle Events can take place with numbers up to the COVID secure capacity of the church. People attending must remain physically distant from people outside their household or support bubble.

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.

As currently advised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference for England and Wales, "there is no duty or responsibility for the faithful to come to church and there is no obligation to attend Mass on Sunday. Parish Priests will review, in each local area, the provision offered by the church in order to ensure that the highest standards of safety are maintained. This will include a review of the role of stewards, the provision of additional social distancing within the church, a review of cleansing routines, and consideration of the personal circumstances of the priest(s) and people."

You will see from the guidance above that there is a local evaluation undertaken and it is for a variety of reasons that a Church may need to close. This would include consideration being given to the vulnerability and willingness of volunteer stewards to manage the buildings and the vulnerability of the priests who also need to be COVID-free for their parishioners and themselves.

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. 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.