

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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 restrictions affect our churches?

During the national lockdown places of worship can remain open for individual prayer and communal worship. You cannot leave your home to meet socially with anyone you do not live with or are in a support bubble with (if you are legally permitted to form one). This includes when you are attending places of worship.

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 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 should not take place in person during the national lockdown.

Can singing take place?

Only singing which is essential to the act of worship should take place. Singing should also be restricted to professional performance or those leading the act of worship. Where singing or chanting is essential to an act of worship, this should be limited to one person wherever possible. Exceptionally, where it is essential to the service, up to three individuals should be permitted to do so. Strict social distancing should be observed and the use of Plexi-glass screens should be considered to protect worshippers, and each other. Communal singing should not take place. This applies even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used.

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. Playing of musical instruments which are blown should be avoided in communal worship and in rehearsals.

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

Weddings and civil partnership ceremonies must only take place with up to 6 people and in exceptional circumstances. This may be for example, an urgent marriage where one of those getting married is seriously ill and not expected to recover, or is to undergo debilitating treatment or life-changing surgery. 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 normal communal worship, 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.. Baptisms which do not take place as an established part of normal communal worship should not take place during the national lockdown.

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.

Can sacramental preparation meetings take place in church?

Catechetical activities such as sacramental preparation sessions should not take place in person during the national lockdown.

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, 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. 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.