



RC DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA

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29th May 2020

PREPARATIONS FOR THE RE-OPENING OF OUR CHURCHES

Dear Fathers,

The doors of our churches have been closed since March 23rd following clear instructions from the Government to assist in the prevention of the spread of the Covid 19 pandemic. In the light of the gradual lifting of the restrictions that were put in place in March, I know that we share with our people a deep desire to re-open our buildings as soon as we are allowed to do so.

Although we have already seen the opening of parks and beaches, garden centres, supermarkets, local shops and car show rooms, based on the idea that these are open spaces of one kind or another, churches have not been seen in the same category.

The Cardinal has been engaged for some time with the relevant authorities of the Government on the necessity of opening our churches, in the first instance for private prayer. There is also a multi-faith task force working with the Government for the purpose of re-opening of places of worship. This is a positive step.

Meanwhile, I am asking all our parish priests to begin making preparations for the re-opening of our churches, initially for private prayer, so that they are safe places for our people to come in to, when they are allowed to do so.

There will need to be control of access, movement and social distancing, to prevent the spreading the virus and the rate of infection. Although the present restrictions have reduced the rate by 60-70%, is not completely eradicated. If the R number were to rise again there may well be a second wave of infection, equally as dangerous as at present.



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There are, then, basic conditions that must be complied with if our churches are to open safely.

What, therefore, can we do to prepare our buildings for opening?

1. The Diocese through the Church Marketplace has ordered bulk supplies of:

- (i) alcohol hand sanitisers (65% alcohol with antiviral properties – nothing else will do);
- (ii) floor marking tape, to mark off appropriate social distances on the floor and on the benches.
- (iii) Disposable gloves for those who will help to clean each day.
- (iv) Masks for all helpers and for those who come to the church without a mask.

These goods will be made available to the seven Deans from whom your own supplies can be collected.

The Diocese will take the appropriate amount of money from each parish account.

2. Every parish will need a good supply of

- (i) normal household disinfectant and detergents suitable for cleaning surfaces in the church. Please be careful of their effect on certain surfaces.
- (ii) A good supply of bin bags to double bag refuse.
- (iii) Appropriate materials for signage such as :Please sanitise your hands; Entrance; Exit; Do not touch; arrows. These can be bought but easier to make your own! If the Church has two entrances, please use one of them as an exit door.
- (iv) an authorised person or persons in the church during the opening hours to sanitise people's hands on the way in and out, and to make sure that social distancing and an appropriate number of people in the church at any one time is maintained.

3. Every Church will need to be thoroughly cleaned before opening – perhaps ask a firm to come and give it a deep clean. It will also be necessary to clean those surfaces which have been used each day with disinfectant and detergent. (and especially door handles). Cloths used for cleaning must be double bagged, stored securely for 72 hours and then thrown away with the regular rubbish. OR they should be washed at 60 degrees or above before being re-used.



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4. General Points

- (i) Toilet facilities must be locked and remain closed to prevent risk of transmission of infection.
- (ii) Only printed material to be taken away from church by the user may be made available (notice sheet). Hymn books, Mass cards, devotional materials should be removed from the church.
- (iii) Physical veneration of relics or statues, crucifixes and shrines is not permitted; no Holy Water in the stoups; Care should be exercised when lighting candles on votive stands.
- (iv) Halls must remain closed because group gatherings are still not allowed by law.

I realise that this must sound pretty challenging but do begin to ask for volunteers to help you to begin to address these tasks, (even from their homes initially). If we can make these preparations then we are much closer to being able to celebrate Mass publicly with and for our people again. I am sure too that these measures will just become a fact of life in our churches for the foreseeable future.

Anything we can do, to ensure that our people of all ages can safely come in again to the Presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and receive the grace and blessing of that precious encounter, is worth our every effort.

I am so grateful to you all for being so faithful in all that you are doing for your communities and beyond during this pandemic. The Lord will see us through it!

I hope that many of you will be able to join me in praying the Rosary some time between 2.00pm and 3.00pm this coming Sunday as part of the UK Rosary Rally. The Rosary will be live streamed from the Cathedral at 2.00pm.



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Meanwhile, I wish you every joy and blessing for the celebration of the great Feast of Pentecost – let us ask the Holy Spirit to renew the Church, our Diocese and each one of us with his power and love.

With continued good wishes and prayer,
Yours devotedly in Christ

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Rt. Revd. Alan Hopes
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