

## Coronavirus: Places of Worship

This is some of the text of the message from Bishop Mark sent to the clergy last week and which I referred to in my update to the parish last Sunday concerning our churches remaining open at this time of lockdown. The text in italics on second page has been slightly amended by me to make more sense as this email was originally addressed to the clergy. The text in red, is for clarification. Fr John

The Coronavirus *Places of Worship Task Force* met on Monday (at the time of writing). Cardinal Nichols represents the Catholic Church on that, supported by Canon Chris Thomas, General Secretary of the Bishop's Conference. In information I (Bishop Mark) have received from the latter, I would like to highlight the following.

### *The safety and opening of churches*

1. The Government have indicated that the new variant is as well controlled by social distancing and the other mitigations as the old. Further studies are taking place for a more concrete verification on this matter.
2. The Government has stressed that there would be no blanket closure of places of worship. They asked that each Place of Worship should re-evaluate their own local situation and examine all factors that could affect the good covid security demonstrated by places of worship so far. This is to include (but is not limited to):
  - a. Sufficient stewarding and management of the Church
  - b. Sufficient cleaning after acts of communal worship
  - c. Maintaining good social distancing in the space available along with good ventilation
  - d. Factors affecting travel to and from the place of worship, such as public transport
  - e. The length of exposure time for an act of worship is critical and should be minimised – anything that is not necessary should be omitted. We should aim for Masses to be no longer than 30 minutes, even on Sundays, if at all possible.
  - f. Those who have gathered for worship should not mingle before or after the service outside of the church. They should disperse immediately.
  - g. All non-essential worship should be postponed or cancelled.
3. The officials noted that keeping Covid-secure places of worship open for public worship **adds no extra burden to the NHS and provides recognised benefits for the community.**
4. The task force expressed with great clarity that the role of the Local Authority is one of enforcement of closure in particular circumstances on

the basis of evidence of lack of COVID security. This has not happened in our Diocese, to my knowledge, but emphasises our joint responsibility to be vigilant with the protocols.

### ***Vaccines and their roll-out in the Community***

1. All faith communities have been asked by the Government to encourage and support the roll-out of the vaccines. You will be aware that St Boniface House is being used for this.
2. *Pope Francis was vaccinated last week gives us an example and his own personal endorsement for vaccination, though perhaps the language is not easily understood in English!* See <https://www.rt.com/news/512030-pope-francis-covid19-vaccine/>
3. There was a request for volunteer support in areas with vaccination hubs/centres, or where people have to travel to be vaccinated. Perhaps our SVP's or other volunteers could assist in ensuring that those invited can get to the designated place when they are approached. There are also lots of different roles that are necessary at the bigger centres, such as stewarding, as well as a request for former healthcare workers to assist in the inoculation programme.
4. The Government published the Vaccination roll-out plan yesterday (**at the time of writing**). It is found here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/951284/UK\\_COVID-19\\_vaccines\\_delivery\\_plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/951284/UK_COVID-19_vaccines_delivery_plan.pdf)

### ***Updated Guidance for Places of Worship***

The Government has updated the Places of Worship Guidance on 11<sup>th</sup> January which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-2-december>