

Briefing Paper from Fr Charles, 18th June 2020

Reopening of Our Lady of England Church for Private Prayer

I had imagined that reopening the church for private prayer would mean that I could maybe rope off alternate benches and parts of the church, provide hand sanitiser, fling open the church doors, and let people in all day, every day just like we normally do. No doubt many of us held that picture in our minds. It's not going to be like that, I'm afraid. Nevertheless, this is still an important moment on our journey this year, as we begin to reopen the house of God to His people.

The church may indeed be God's house, and a consecrated building. But for the COVID-19 risk assessment it must be viewed with the same caution as a shop or bank or any other public building. Furthermore the same monitoring and control you may have experienced in other public buildings is required here too.

We have to have stewards (ideally two at a time) on the door to advise and check that social distancing is being maintained, and if necessary to limit numbers inside at any one time. We also have to ensure the church is cleaned regularly, especially contact surfaces, and this needs to be done in a way that minimises risk to the cleaners. Neither stewards nor cleaners should be from a vulnerable group due to age or underlying health conditions.

So we're going to start slowly and cautiously. **The opening times will be Saturday 10am-12noon and Tuesday 2pm-4pm.** The first opening will be this Saturday, 20th June. These limited times have been chosen for the following reasons:

- leaving a 72 hour gap between openings, letting surfaces decontaminate naturally, reducing risk to cleaners
- a weekend and a weekday time
- a morning and an afternoon time
- limited personnel immediately available
- a modest start to assess demand and 'footfall'.

Those considering making a visit should make their own risk assessment of the benefit of praying in church rather than praying at home or outside, versus the risk to them of entering a public building. Those who visit should expect the following:

- for the lift-off, Fr Charles will lead the stewarding
- please wait until a steward invites you in
- please use the hand sanitiser on entering and exiting
- face masks are not compulsory and won't be provided, but you are welcome to bring your own.
- signs reminding you to keep social distancing
- some benches will be roped off, only part of the nave will be accessible
- the Blessed Sacrament Chapel will NOT be accessible, instead the Blessed Sacrament will be reserved on the main altar for adoration
- the toilets will NOT be available, except for the stewards, and for emergencies.
- all doors will be propped open, so no touch is required to enter the church, and to maximise ventilation with fresh air – bear this in mind and dress accordingly if you feel a draught even in summer time.

- open doors will mean that it won't be as silent in the church as you may have been used to, stewards will endeavour to keep any external chat to a minimum and away from the doors
- NOT TO COME IF YOU HAVE ANY COVID-19 SYMPTOMS

Votive lights are a little problematic, but I hope, with care, that they will be available. If so, they will be already laid out in the holders on the stands so that you simply pick up the one you are going to light without having to touch anything else. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO LIGHT ONE WHILE THE HAND SANITISER IS STILL MOIST ON YOUR HANDS – IT IS 65% ALCOHOL AND IS FLAMMABLE.**

I'm sorry this all seems so heavy for what should be something so simple. I would, however, encourage us all to see value in this discipline, not so much for now, **but as a rehearsal of what will need to be in place when we begin to restart public Mass and other church services.**

To that end, we need volunteers/recruits to be stewards, cleaners, and probably someone(s) to coordinate, draw up rotas, and keep an overview of this project as it goes forward and increases in complexity as we open up further. Here are some further pointers about these roles to consider if you are able to help the parish in this way.

Steward

- Good people skills and people awareness
- Able to say no, even to someone who may be upset or annoyed at not being allowed in if there's a problem in the church or it's reached capacity and there's no more space
- Able to be friendly, but to keep the chat down and away from the open doors
- Safeguarding training a bonus, or willingness to receive some online safeguarding training from the diocese
- Not be at risk through age or underlying health condition
- 18+
- Current times are Sat 10-12 and Tue 2-4. Other times will be required as we go forward.

Cleaner

- Not be at risk through age or underlying health condition
- Willing to wear gloves (supplied) and take other precautions
- Willing to clean surfaces touched by others
- Current cleaning window is Friday after 4pm, or Saturday morning before 10am. This may change, and become more frequent as things open up further
- Able to work in a socially distanced way with others
- Note that initially it will only be a portion of the nave requiring cleaning.

Coordinator(s)

- May or may not be a cleaner or steward.
- The rota part could be done from home
- Some onsite checking probably required
- Liaise with Fr Charles