

Acts of public worship suspended in Catholic Churches in England and Wales

Wednesday, March 18th, 2020 @ 11:47 am

A letter from the President and Vice-President on behalf of all the Bishops of the Conference

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, so many aspects of our lives must change. This includes the ways in which we publicly express our faith. It is very clear that, following official advice and in order to keep each other safe, save lives and support the NHS, at this time we must not gather for public acts of worship in our churches. This will begin from Friday evening, 20th March 2020, until further notice.

Our churches will remain open. They are not closing. They will be a focal point of prayer, where you will find solace and strength. In visiting our churches at this time, we will observe with great care the practices of hygiene and the guidance on social distancing.

However, the celebration of Mass, Sunday by Sunday and day by day, will take place without a public congregation. Knowing that the Mass is being celebrated; joining in spiritually in that celebration; watching the live-streaming of the Mass; following its prayers at home; making an act of spiritual communion: this is how we share in the Sacrifice of Christ in these days. These are the ways in which we will sanctify Sunday, and indeed every day.

We want everyone to understand that in these emergency circumstances, and for as long as they last, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is removed. This is, without doubt, the teaching of the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2181). This pandemic is the 'serious reason' why this obligation does not apply at this time.

Your own bishop and parish priest will provide further support, encouragement and information about our way of prayer together in the coming weeks.

The second vital aspect of these challenging times is our care for each other. There are so many ways in which we are to do this: being attentive to the needs of our neighbour, especially the elderly and vulnerable; contributing to our local food banks; volunteering for charitable initiatives and organisations; simply keeping in touch by all the means open to us.

During these disturbing and threatening times, the rhythm of the prayer of the Church will continue. Please play your part in it. The effort of daily kindness and mutual support for all will continue and increase. Please play your part in this too. For your commitment to this, we thank you.

*'The Lord is my shepherd,
There is nothing I shall want.'*

May God bless us all.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols

President of the Bishops' Conference

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon OP

Vice-President of the Bishops' Conference

Catholic Churches Closed to the Public

Tuesday, March 24th, 2020 @ 11:01 am

In order to keep each other safe, save lives and support the NHS, at this time our Catholic churches are closed to the public.

Full Closure of Catholic Churches

Following the Prime Minister's historic announcement last night (23 March) strengthening restrictions in an attempt to combat the spread of COVID-19, **Catholic Churches are closed to the public at this time.**

Cardinal Vincent Nichols stresses that we must all play our part to safeguard the NHS and to save 'precious lives'.

"We're going to play our full part in it. That was the call of St. Paul that we ought to be good citizens and today we ought to be good citizens playing our part in the protection of the vulnerable, in our support for the NHS and in the preserving of human life, which is so precious to God in the face of this virus."

Full Text

This morning, we are all coming to terms with that most remarkable, historic, dramatic announcement of the Prime Minister last night. He made our duty very clear. And it's a duty which we must all wholeheartedly follow. That is the right thing to do because he wants us to play our part in stopping the spread of this virus – in helping to protect and get the best use of the NHS and therefore save precious lives.

What is clear to me and to my fellow bishops and to the Prime Minister is that we must now close our churches.

It's not essential for people to travel to go to church in order to pray. We have to learn more and more that our prayer is rooted in our hearts and can be shared with our families. Open churches will only tempt people to travel. And that is not

good practice now. So we have to deepen these words of prayer. We have to use the Internet, and all the other things that we have, to encourage one another. When you phone your parents or your parents phone you, why not suggest that you end with a moment of prayer together? Say that Hail Mary, say a prayer that you know – but say it together. It's a comfort and a reassurance.

The second thing about this morning is we're beginning to reflect on the experience of the streaming of the celebration of Mass on Sunday and on yesterday's week day. There are many, many encouraging signs. I've heard of congregations being 10 times the normal size. I've heard of families preparing together at home. Families having their own little children's liturgy during the reading of the Word.

Families joining in the singing or providing their own music – if there wasn't any music in the church itself. In these coming weeks – and there will be many of them – we can strengthen this sense of being part of the celebration of the Mass via the Internet. And of course there is that important act of spiritual communion, when at the same moment, we join with the celebrants of the Mass and all those who are taking part in it online and spiritually receive the Lord into our hearts.

These are challenging times. We're not looking for loopholes. We're not trying to find ways round this provision. We're going to play our full part in it. That was the call of St. Paul that we ought to be good citizens and today we ought to be good citizens playing our part in the protection of the vulnerable, in our support for the NHS and in the preserving of human life, which is so precious to God in the face of this virus.

May God bless you and let's keep going wholeheartedly together. Thank you.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or want to contact the author of these sheets, please contact [Cristina Gangemi of the Kairos Forum](#)