

5TH JANUARY 2021

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATOR:

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when you pass through the rivers; they will not sweep you away. When you walk through the fire; you will not be burned, nor will the flames consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour ... Fear not, I am with you”

(Isaiah 43: 2-3, 5)

Dear Friends in Christ,

Greetings and compliments of the season!

I hope this meets you all in the warmth and comfort of the Lord!

The speech of the PM last evening did not come as surprise to so many of us. But it certainly has caused more panic and confusion among very many people. It is in the light of this that I find it pertinent to send this message to clear some doubts, assure you of our prayerful support and restore hope.

We all know that we are currently in Tier 4 of the lockdown. This implies stricter restrictions, more restraints and discipline.

WHAT DOES THE GOVERNMENT REGULATION SAY ABOUT TIER 4 AND PUBLIC WORSHIP?

HM Government’s National Lockdown Guidance notes for England, page four of which relates specifically to places of worship says:

Communal worship and life events - *You can leave home to attend or visit a place of worship for communal worship, a funeral or event related to a death, a burial ground or a remembrance garden, or to attend a wedding ceremony. You should follow the guidance on the safe use of places of worship and must not mingle with anyone outside of your household or support bubble when attending a place of worship. Weddings, funerals and religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to someone’s death are all subject to limits on the numbers that can attend, and weddings and civil ceremonies may only take place in exceptional circumstances.*

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE?

The guidance below has been issued by the Bishops' Conference, which offers particular clarification to points raised in the above government regulation.

Communal worship, including prayers, devotions or meditations led by a Minister of Religion or lay person: Mass and other acts of worship can continue as normal following the covid-security guidance that has been published by the Bishops' Conference after consultation with officials from Public Health England and MHCLG.

Marriage ceremonies: As national lockdown is essentially Tier 5, only 6 people can attend a marriage (apart from anyone working as part of the ceremony) and these should only occur in exceptional circumstances. Weddings planned for the next 6 weeks should be deferred.

Funerals: In all areas, there must be no more than 30 people attending. Anyone working is not included as part of the 30-person limit. Attendees should socially distance from anyone they do not live with (unless they are in their support bubble).

As national lockdown is essentially Tier 5, only 6 people can attend a commemorative event which would include the interment of ashes after a cremation. The immediate burial of a coffin after a church or crematorium-based service would be subject to 30 people or the restrictions imposed locally by the graveyard or crematorium authorities.

Significant life cycle events, outside of marriage ceremonies and funerals: This means that the numbers of people permitted to attend life-cycle events such as **baptisms, confirmations** and other significant sacramental celebrations are subject to the covid-security determined limits of the church.

Small prayer and study groups: As national lockdown is essentially Tier 5, in person prayer or study groups (which would include catechesis for the

celebration of the sacraments) should not take place physically, but only using online means.

Face Coverings: *Face coverings must be worn in places of worship, unless you are exempt. This is now law.*

Summary: *It is important that during this time all places of worship continue to provide hand sanitiser at points of access and egress, there should be stewarding and managed social distancing within the church space and that full cleaning of the space should be done immediately after the church has been in use.*

The time that people are in the church should be minimised (so the use of liturgical choices should reflect this, including a short homily, the omission of the prayers of the faithful and any other permitted mitigations) and the church must be well ventilated even during the liturgical celebrations. There should be no congregational singing as part of the liturgical celebrations and if a choir or cantors sing, the choices of music should be such that the exposure time is not excessively prolonged.

It is very important to encourage all who attend our churches to abide by these covid-security restrictions and to protect themselves and those around them. It is also an opportunity to thank those who clean and steward our churches for their generosity of service to the local community.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT US?

As a parish in communion with the Archdiocese of Southwark, UK, we shall abide by all the Bishops Conference and the UK government have directed. Within our particular and peculiar circumstances, we shall apply these directives as follows:

1. We shall encourage everyone to make the most of the opportunities we have to attend Mass as often as relatively possible.
2. We love to remind us that Sunday Mass is still NOT OBLIGATORY, and therefore, attending one Weekday Mass or more per week suffices for a Sunday Mass. Thus, we encourage parishioners, especially those within the vulnerable age group, to attend any of the Weekday Masses (Monday – Saturday, 10. 00 am), which always has very low attendance, instead of

coming for a more crowded Sunday Mass. You can make your weekly offering at any of the Masses you attend. Or, as already set up with your bank through Standing Order. The Forms for Gift Aid and Standing Order are still available in the foyer of the Church and in the Office.

3. From the weekend of 16th/17th January 2021, we shall be having FOUR MASSES in the parish until further notice. **The Evening Mass on Sunday will remain cancelled until further notice. We shall maintain the following Masses: Saturday 6. 00 pm; Sunday: 9. 00 am; 10. 30 am; 12. 00 noon only.** We sincerely regret the inconveniences this decision may cause some of us, but this is as a result of the need for us to avoid putting much pressure on the stewards, who volunteer to welcome and clean up the Church; and on ourselves. We all need to be careful and to avoid contacts as much as possible. Some parishes in the archdiocese have already closed down completely for various reasons. We do not want anything to cause us to go that far.
4. Hopefully, we shall be able to livestream the 10. 30am Mass on every Sunday via YouTube and Facebook as soon as the Archdiocesan Chancery is open and our administrative papers are taken care of. We inform all parishioners and encourage you to tune in and celebrate with us.
5. The Church will continue to be open for Private Prayers and Adoration on Wednesdays and Fridays from after Morning Mass to noon (10. 30 am to 12. 00).
6. Life cycle events – baptism, marriage and funerals – will continue within the above stated restrictions. Please contact the Office to discuss schedule and procedures.
7. Needless to emphasise that we should ensure complete adherence to all safety measures as directed by the governments and the bishops – compulsory wearing of face masks, sanitising before and after Mass, maintaining social distancing and orderly approach to Holy Communion.
8. We are still appealing to individuals to assist in cleaning the Church after Mass.
9. We are available for Sacrament of Reconciliation on Saturday morning after Mass and on request.

We appreciate the difficulties of this challenging times and we can imagine how hard these adjustments have been for us all. But within these challenges and life-changing situations, we must never give up hope. Our faith should inspire us to deeper trust in God, Who has not only promised to save us but to accompany us “through the waters, the rivers and the fire.” The key word here is *through*. God never promised us an easy walk, but He certainly assures us a safe landing. This is our waters, rivers and fire: together we shall walk through because “this too shall pass away.” Therefore, let us stand together and walk through this with God beside us.

Be assured of our prayers for you. We shall continue to pray for you and provide services to you as much as we can within the limits of these restrictions.

Once again, we wish you a very happy and grace-filled New Year 2021!

With love and service,

Fr. Patrick Udotai

Parochial Administrator