

Reopening of Straide Church for public Masses from June 29th

After so many weeks of lock down it is great to be able to open our Church again for the public celebration of Masses from Monday, June 29th – providing the government gives the final approval.

While it is good to be reopening to the public, it is important to bear in mind that the experience of attending Mass will be a little different than before. This is due to the protocols we must now put in place in order to reopen safely.

The protocols listed below are based on those formulated by the Western bishops for implementation in the western dioceses (available to read at <https://achonrydiocese.org/returntoworship>) .

In order to reopen, the Church must also guarantee implementation of the government stipulations as outlined in its *Return to Work Safety Protocol* document (available to read on gov.ie.) It must also follow the *Allianz Guidelines for reopening Churches*.

Overall Rationale:

The aim of the measures being introduced is to reduce, or eliminate, the possibility of Covid-19 being spread inside or outside of the Church building. This is achieved by a combination of social distancing, hand hygiene, sneeze etiquette as well as reducing the physical movement of people as much as possible while inside the Church.

Assistance is now needed:

The protocols we must now adopt include, as you would expect, hand sanitising, social distancing as well as the recommended wearing of masks. Another feature will be the sanitisation / cleaning of the Church between Masses. This is necessary to ensure no virus can survive on seats, door handles, surfaces, candelabras etc. This is, perhaps, the most challenging aspect of the requirements.

Any help than can be given in this respect would be much appreciated. I know many of our younger parishioners love being involved in our parish community. This may be a great opportunity for them to help out in Church on behalf of all the parish community, especially for those who can no longer do this work.

Sunday Obligation:

- The Sunday / Holyday obligation remains suspended for the time being. However, many people will wish to recommence attending Mass.
- Traditionally, most parishioners attend Mass at the weekends to fulfil their Sunday Obligation. While this obligation is temporarily suspended, parishioners may prefer to attend one of the weekday Masses where numbers in attendance may not be as large as at the weekend.
- Those who cannot come to Mass are invited to participate by following the Mass on webcam / television.
- Those who are sick (or have any symptoms of, or are confirmed, COVID-19) should stay at home.
- Close contacts of a person who has a confirmed (or suspected) case of the virus should stay at home.
- It is suggested that those in the vulnerable category might also stay at home.

Seating Capacity:

The current 2 metre social distance rule applies. This may change, in the future, to 1 metre. Thus, arrangements that will apply to both eventualities are outlined below:

The Church has 36 pews.

- A. Where **2 Metre** social distancing is required, every third pew is used for seating – i.e. **12 pews are available for seating**. The two pews in between are cordoned off and cannot be used. These 12 pews can each seat a family / household as well as a single individual seated at the other end of the pew. Likewise, a pew can also seat two individuals seated at either end of the pew.

- B. Where **1 Metre** social distancing is required, every second pew is used for seating – i.e. **18 pews are available for seating**. The pews in between are cordoned off and cannot be used. These pews can each seat a family / household as well as a single individual seated at the other end of the pew. Likewise, a pew can also seat three individuals seated in the middle and at either end of the pew.

With reduced capacity, those who arrive first will be facilitated first in finding a seat. Others may have to remain in the grounds (or in their cars) while at all times maintaining social distancing.

In the interests of fairness, seats cannot be reserved for individuals. Thus, those who attend an Anniversary Mass for a family member / relation should arrive early to gain a seat.

Hand sanitiser and face coverings:

It is recommended that hands be washed with soapy water before leaving home for the Church. In addition, hand sanitisers should be used on entering and leaving the Church. These are supplied. Parishioners are also recommended to carry small containers of sanitiser for personal use.

It is now highly recommended that people use face coverings while attending gatherings indoors. Government guidelines may make this compulsory at a later stage.

Altar Servers, Ministers of the Eucharist, Readers & Altar Society:

- Altar servers are very welcome. However, they will not robe and will be asked to sit in the front pews and serve Mass from there.
- Initially, Readers and Ministers of the Eucharist will not be required. These roles will resume again shortly.
- Choirs are welcome to sing from the gallery – provided social distancing is maintained and hymn books are not shared.
- The Altar Society can recommence as normal.

Holy Communion:

In order to keep movement within the Church to a minimum, Holy Communion will be distributed at the end of Mass when all others have left. Those not receiving should leave the Church through the main entrance (row by row, beginning with the row closest to the exit doors).

Those who wish to receive Communion should remain behind and approach the Communion Station row by row while, at the same time, maintaining social distancing. They can then exit by the side entrance or return to their seats by the side aisles.

Holy Communion will be given on the hand only and through a “letter box” opening in a Perspex Screen which shields communicants and minister from one another.

Holy Water:

Holy Water will not be available inside or outside the Church.

Newsletters:

Newsletters (unfolded) will be available as usual from the tables located near the entrances. If handling a Newsletter, please bring it home. Do not leave it on the seat, as it will have to be collected and discarded afterwards. Please be especially mindful of others in this respect.

Offertory Collection:

Baskets will not be passed around during the Offertory. Instead, it will be possible to put offerings into designated containers either when entering or leaving the Church.

Funerals:

Until June 29th funerals are confined to 25 people being present. From June 29th the numbers allowed in the Church will be determined by the capacity noted above.

- Handshaking / the offering of condolences at all stages is prohibited.
- Maintaining physical distance remains a priority. This applies in the Church grounds and cemetery as well as in the Church. At funerals, it is easy for this to become the weakest link, especially in the Church grounds and in the cemetery. All due care should be taken to maintain the required social distancing at all times.

Baptism:

The requirements for hygiene, social distancing and maximum numbers in the Church will pertain as outlined above.

- The wearing of a face covering by the celebrant is recommended when physical distancing cannot be observed.
- The wearing of face coverings for all others is also recommended.
- The celebrant will sign the child with the Cross without touching the forehead as was normal.
- The anointing with the Holy Oils will be administered by the use of cotton buds.
- A jug of fresh water will be blessed and used for the Baptism.

Marriage:

The requirements for hygiene, social distancing and maximum numbers in the Church will pertain as outlined above.

- The wearing of face coverings by guests is recommended.
- Group photographs in the church and grounds and the greeting of guests at the exit may not be possible due to physical distancing requirements.

Pastoral Care of the Sick:

Monthly visitation of the sick is, in theory, allowed after June 29th. However, due to the risk of transmitting infection, only urgent sick calls will be attended to. All others who would appreciate a visit can advise accordingly and will be facilitated by way of a visit if deemed appropriate to do so.