

The Parish of Our Lady of the Rosary

Bexhill-on-Sea

St Mary Magdalene's, Town Centre & St Martha's, Little Common

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Trinity Sunday

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Re: Church Re-Opening

I have received the first tentative advice on the re-opening of Churches. As yet there is no date given for their re-opening, but we have been asked to make some preparations.

The bishops, priests and people have expressed to the government our deep desire that our places of worship open without undue delay, but such opening must happen in a safe manner, and in stages. In the first instance, Churches would re-open for private / individual prayer only.

Not every Church will be ready to open in the first wave and only those Churches where we can guarantee the necessary **routines of supervision, social distancing and cleansing** will be allowed to open. As Parish Priest, I retain the legal responsibility to comply with the regulations and so any re-opening in our parish will be gradual and will begin at **St Mary Magdalene**, in the town centre where the priests are resident and can maintain oversight.

It is clear that Fr Rajesh and I will not be able to manage the re-opening of the Church on our own, and so, Bishop Richard has asked that I begin to **recruit a team to fulfil the necessary routines**, so that the opening may start soon after the permission to re-open has been given. This will, I am sure you will appreciate, require the effort and commitment of the whole parish. In my homilies I have often echoed the Bishop's priorities of prayer, formation, and mission. At this time, the priority for us is to show the wider community that prayer is an essential activity and that the Church is a place where they may bring their various needs and intentions.

If you are willing to be part of this team of **supervisors and cleaners** please would you get in touch via email: stmm@btconnect.com, letting me know what days and times of day you would be available, as this will give me an idea of when and for how long the Church of St Mary Magdalene might be open for. From this we can draw up a rota of volunteers.

Ideally you will already hold DBS clearance from the Diocese or other similar organisation and provide the details to the parish safeguarding representative. It is important to note that this team **cannot** be drawn up from those who have been instructed to shield, **nor**, as a general rule, from groups considered to be more vulnerable to coronavirus (e.g. *those over 70 and those who have underlying medical conditions*).

What might be required? Further guidance will be issued as necessary, but in general terms:

Supervision: a team member(s) would be on the door, to facilitate and regulate entry to the Church, and to ensure that people follow any signs and directions.

Cleaning: normal disinfectants and detergents are suitable for cleaning, but we can no longer fall back on a contractor to do it, especially as the Church will need to be cleansed daily and throughout the opening hours, as necessary. Gloves, aprons etc will need to be worn.

Social Distancing: the Church will be marked to assist people in staying safe, and benches clearly marked as open or closed, and there will be restrictions on how many people can be in the Church at any one time and restrictions on where they can and cannot go.

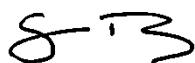
Supplies: the diocese are sourcing the necessary supplies for cleaning and social distancing.

These measures may seem burdensome and even a little daunting, but they are necessary because we must not be seen, in any way, to be responsible for a further spread or increase of the virus which would lead to longer or even stricter prohibitions placed upon us.

The reopening of Churches will incur costs to the parish, especially in terms of purchasing the necessary cleaning and sanitising solutions. Thank you for those who have continued to give via standing order or by using the Diocesan '*Just Giving Scheme*' (details in the weekly newsletter). Please **do not send cash or cheques** to the parish office as we do not currently have the facility to account or process them.

In time, we may be able to look at opening St Martha's for some time of private prayer. Prior to the lockdown, it was not routinely open during the week and so, we will consider St Martha's church as part of our incremental re-opening. This preparation relates only to the opening of Churches for private prayer because at the time of writing, group gatherings are not permitted by law. In time, further guidance will be issued.

Yours sincerely,



Fr Simon Dray, Parish Priest