



Re-opening of Churches

Phase One



Parish of Our Lady of the Rosary, Bexhill on Sea

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

Re-opening of Churches in the Parish of Bexhill

Phase One Plan: June 2020.

*** *permission pending* ***

Background

On 20th March, the Church in England & Wales instigated its Stage 3 COVID-19 response and suspended public liturgies but kept the Churches open for private prayer, until, on 24th March the Government instigated 'lockdown', which necessitated the closure of Churches even to private prayer.

In the Government's Roadmap for lifting the lockdown, the opening of Churches was grouped into Stage 3, which allowed the resumption of activity (with social distancing) of what it deemed non-essential shops and institutions from the 4th July. The Government established various task forces, one which looked at places of worship and it concluded that places of worship did provide an essential service, recognizing the benefit to the mental health and wellbeing of people of faith.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols assured the taskforce that Churches could open the Churches for private prayer and that parishes would put in place **routines of social distancing, routines of cleanliness and routines of supervision**; and that Churches that could not do this would not open until such precautions were in place, saying that **local considerations would be taken into account**, meaning not every Church would be open in phase one. With the agreement of the Government, places of worship may now open for private prayer only from an earlier date: 15th June 2020. **NB: Bexhill, permission is still pending.**

Please note, private prayer means individuals saying their prayers quietly to themselves; it does not permit the celebration of Mass or other liturgies, or even group led devotions. These forms of worship and devotion will be dealt with in later phases of opening, when it is safe to do so, and in line with government advice and the directives of the Bishop (*the Diocesan Ordinary*) or the Bishops Conference of England & Wales.

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Preparing for Phase One

Bishop Richard, in his letter to clergy, said that priests would not be able to manage the re-opening of Churches on their own and that they would need teams of volunteers to achieve the routines of supervision, cleaning and social distancing.

Fr Simon wrote to the parish on Trinity Sunday:

- Indicating that we would start with St Mary Magdalene, the Parish Church, and the place where the priests are resident and can maintain oversight.
- asking for parishioners to volunteer as supervisors and cleaners so that a schedule of opening could be worked out.
 - he indicated that the volunteers should not come from vulnerable groups (**e.g. 70+ or with identified COVID-19 underlying health conditions**).
 - he indicated that the volunteers would ideally hold a valid DBS check.

The diocese is setting up a central supply of the necessary cleaning products, and some have already been delivered. Access to the Church will be restricted to minimise the cleaning routines. **NB: not all the necessary materials have been delivered to Bexhill.**

Response from the appeal for help:

Twelve parishioners volunteered to be part of the Supervisory and Cleaning Team. Eight volunteers had similar availability to create two teams of four volunteers, which allows for the Church to be open for two mornings a week. This allows some flexibility within the team and does not overburden or take their willingness to serve for granted but always ensures at least two team members are on duty during a shift.

Two volunteers had different availability and their names have been recorded to assist in a secondary phase of opening. On consideration, a further two volunteers did not satisfy the Health & Safety requirements; we thank them for their willingness to serve and we can always find them other work in due course!

If additional volunteers come forward, we may be able to extend Phase One opening to additional days of the week or we will hold their names for future phases.

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Phase One Opening

Memorial Garden

From Monday 15th June, parishioners will be able to access the Memorial Garden for private prayer, using the code C3468. You may access the garden between the hours 9am to 5pm, seven days a week. **NB: permission still pending.**

Routines of social distancing: In conformity to the wider community regulations, no more than 6 people may be in the garden at anyone time, and people should stay 2 metres apart from each other. Facemasks are optional.

Routines of supervision: Primarily, supervision will be self-regulation; only those with the code may enter the garden. This will be published in the on-line newsletter. It should not be given verbally to a person in the street. As with flats and apartments, please ensure the garden gate closes as you enter and exit the garden, and do not hold the gate open for people you do not know.

Routines of cleanliness: this is an outdoor space.

St Mary Magdalene Church, Sea Road, Town Centre

With two teams of volunteers the Church will initially be open as follows: **permission pending**

Fridays: 09:30am to 11:30am *starting Friday 19th June. (permission pending)*

Saturdays: 09:30am to 11:30am *starting Saturday 20th June. (permission pending)*

The Church will remain closed on all other days and times.

Routines of Social distancing:

- The back third of the Church will be available for private prayer, up to the statue of St Anthony.
- A maximum 8 people (*in addition to the supervisors on duty*) may be in the Church at any one time¹. There is also space for one wheelchair.
- During opening times there is no time limit on private prayer, but we ask people to be mindful of their surroundings and of those who may be waiting to come in.
- Group led prayer or services are not permitted in Phase One opening.
- The pews will be marked to show people where they may sit or not sit.
- People should always maintain a 2-metre social distance.
- People should follow the one-way system
 - Entry through the porch (as usual).

¹ With a 2-metre gap, forwards, backwards, left and right.

- Exit through the side doors by St Anthony's.
- Face coverings are optional for visitors.

Routines of Supervision:

- The supervisors hold DBS checks with the Parish or other recognisable and trustworthy organisations and have been appointed by the Parish Priest to fulfil their role.
- At least 2 voluntary supervisors will be on duty when the Church is open.
- While on duty they act '*vicariously*'² in the name of the Parish Priest. Please follow their guidance.
- The supervisors will direct you to hand sanitisers, the one-way system and point out the social distancing signs.
- They may ask you to wait outside until space is available to pray.
- Supervisors will have a mobile telephone for emergencies.
- Stewards will not routinely assist people with physical mobility.
- Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Routines of Cleanliness:

- Hand sanitisers will be available at entry and exit doors.
- As would be expected in a Church, no food or drink may be consumed in the Church.
- People with cold or flu symptoms will not be permitted to enter the Church.
- The Church has been cleaned before the implementation of Phase One. Clutter and other unnecessary items have been removed from the open areas, and no hymn book or prayers books will be issued.
- There is a one-way system in place, with doors open to facilitate free movement of people and fresh air to circulate and flow through.
- The on-duty team will clean the Church after each session, and periodically wipe down surfaces and door handles which have been touched during the opening hours.
- The Government advises that normal household disinfectant and detergents are suitable for cleaning.
- Face coverings: Stewards are encouraged to wear masks, but visitors should use their discretion and supply their own if they so wish.
- Toilets will be closed.
- Visitors should not touch the statues.

² The authority of the parish priest (vicar) has been given over to the supervisors for the specific role of supervising the Church during the time that the Church is open for Private Prayer.