

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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2nd July 2020

Dear Parishioner,

Re: Update on Resuming Public Liturgies

The Government announced that communal acts of worship may recommence from 4th July. Our Bishops also give approval, **on the assumption that their guidance and instructions of social distancing, supervision, and cleanliness regarding the opening of the Churches for Private Prayer has been met.**

In Bexhill, this has only been partially met, now with four teams of volunteers facilitating private prayer before the Blessed Sacrament on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday mornings between 9.30am and 11.30am, and now on a Wednesday evening between 6.30pm and 8.00pm. We appeal for more volunteer Stewards, who hold a *Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)* check with the parish, who are 70 years or under, and free from underlying health conditions.

In this letter, we can tell you what is currently possible in Bexhill, which will vary from Parish to Parish across the Deanery and Diocese. As Bishop Richard told the Clergy it is a matter of **when the parish is ready, not working to a set date.** We must be sure that we have all the necessary precautions in place before we can gather for public liturgies.

To start with:

The **Parish Office** remains closed until further notice, as our administrators are furloughed.

The **Presbytery** remains strictly a residence for the priests until further notice.

The **Clergy** must also protect their day off each week.

Parishioners are asked to continue to make their **weekly offering** either by BACs payment or via the **Diocesan Just Giving** option (see newsletter), without which the parish will suffer.

NB: We cannot afford to pay contractors to perform the cleaning.

When can we return to public Masses? We are not yet returning to normal, and so, the Sunday Obligation remains suspended. When Masses do resume, people will be encouraged to attend one Mass across the days of the week, to flatten out the demand. Those shielding or nervous about public gatherings should feel no compulsion to return to Mass, until it is safe.

Social distancing remains a reality, reducing the capacity of St Mary Magdalene Church to just **40 people**. To accommodate our pre-pandemic Mass attendance of 750 people, we would need 19 Masses just to accommodate the Sunday congregation, **each with a team of stewards (& cleaners) to be COVID-secure**. That is not going to happen. The Stewards must 'enforce' the 40-person limit, either with a physical barrier once capacity is reached or by checking off names from a pre-booked list, neither are attractive prospects.

Even if only 50% of the parish are ready to return to Mass, we would struggle to accommodate everyone. **Therefore, we are not ready to resume public Masses from 4th July.**

We need a large pool of stewards to do this. There must be two stewards on duty, meaning each team should have four people in it to ensure viability **now and in the weeks and months to come**. Volunteers should meet the criteria as listed on page one. This is the new form of 'ministry' required in our parish.

As of 1st July, we have four teams of volunteers, and yes, the mornings and evening they facilitate could be converted to Masses, but even with both priests celebrating Masses in these sessions only a small number of parishioner would be able to attend Mass. This also assumes that no-one is permitted to attend or stay for more than one Mass a week. In the interim period, the priest can act as his own sacristan and perform all the liturgical functions within the Mass, which itself is prescribed to be celebrated in its simplest form.

Thus, there will not be a **rapid return to public Masses this weekend** and parishioners should continue to Live Stream. *Please do not cross the border into other parishes searching for Mass, they have their own capacity restrictions.* Our first aim is to find a team of stewards for each day of the week. Until then, it is prudent to keep Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday sessions for private prayer. **Once we have a team of stewards for each day**, we might be ready to celebrate Mass each day in St Mary Magdalene. Once that is established, we can think how to open the Mass centre at St Martha's, which remains closed until further notice.

An occasional outside Mass, at a suitable (*and yet undetermined*) location, may be possible, but the weather and transportation of the kit means it could not be a regular occurrence.

Our aim is also to provide some provisions for **Funerals**. Initially, **we can only accommodate Requiem Masses on Wednesday and Friday mornings at 10am**, when stewards are on duty. When a funeral occurs, the Church will not be available for private prayer as the family will need the whole capacity of 40 people. Funerals will be listed in the on-line newsletter.

There are several **baptisms** (Adult and Children) that have been on hold since March. We have their contact details and will reach out to them shortly to agree a new date for a Baptism in St Mary Magdalene, explaining what is required in terms of social distancing and cleaning. New applications can be made using the online form at the Parish Website.

Weddings are permitted again, but with restrictions on numbers. Fr Simon will discuss each wedding with the couple, explaining what is required in terms of social distancing and cleaning.

Our **First Holy Communions** should have happened on 30th May, 6th June and 13th June. We need to complete these before we can accept new applications for 2021. Please remain patient. As large gatherings are not possible, we may have to consider family Masses, but we are not ready to implement this. **Confirmations** should have happened on 7th June. As the Bishop will no longer be conferring the sacrament this year, Parish Priests will now administer the sacrament. The Deanery will discuss further what is possible and we will update you when we know more. Please do not submit applications for 2021 until explicitly invited to do so.

We will also resume the **Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)**. For the time being Fr Simon and Fr Rajesh will be available during the **Saturday morning session** between 9.30am and 11.30am, starting from 11th July, pushing the Live Stream Mass back to 12 noon.

As time moves forward, and as we add more stewards, we hope to celebrate public Masses. The routines of cleaning are extensive, the Church must be cleaned after every person has passed through, and so, if you are not in a restricted group, please offer your services as Stewards. This is the only way forward until the precautions return to '*normal*' levels.

Please pray for your parish clergy team as we continue to pray for you,

Yours sincerely,

Fr. Simon Dray,
Parish Priest

Fr Rajesh Minz,
Assistant Priest

Rev. Simon Kirkdale
Parish Deacon