

Armagh Diocesan Response Guidance

Updated guidance in red

Church of Ireland's Return to In-Church Worship Protocols for ROI and NI.

The Church of Ireland has published protocols for a return to in-church worship to provide guidance to parishes in relation to the re-opening of places of worship that have been closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The document is available at <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Resources/ParishResources/COVID19/ReturntoChurchProtocols.pdf>

In a joint introduction, Archbishop John McDowell and Archbishop Michael Jackson write: "Reopening churches for public worship is only possible if it can be done safely and by minimising the risk of spreading Covid-19. We strongly commend the implementation of these protocols." A video from the Archbishops launching and introducing the advice, is available at <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/9784/guidance-on-returning-to-inchurch>

Nine stages for reopening church buildings are set out, starting with communicating with workers and parishioners prior to opening on a specific date. The protocols have been prepared by representatives from the House of Bishops, the RB Executive Committee and Representative Church Body staff.

At all times, parishes must comply fully with all relevant current legislation in their respective jurisdiction, and follow the advice of health authorities, particularly in relation to social distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory hygiene.

1. Public Worship

Services – All public acts of worship continue to be ceased until further notice. Church buildings have not been open to the public, including for funerals, however churches may be reopened for the purposes of private prayer and/or their carpark for drive-in services, **provided a risk assessment has been completed and that social distancing and hygiene regulations can be adhered to.** Parishes have been provided with further guidance directly in this regard.

Parishes are also encouraged to make plans for the re-opening of churches once this is permitted in the relevant jurisdiction, and are therefore directed to the protocols for doing so.

Online Media – Clergy broadcasting services online should **continue** doing so from the church or their home. Should the broadcast take place from the church, physical distancing should apply, hygiene guidance should be observed and no more than **3** people should be present in the church **at any one time** for the broadcast.

Previous videos streamed on line for worshipping from home are available on the Diocesan website <https://www.armagh.anglican.org>

If your parish co-ordinates worship resources that can be accessed online, please inform the Diocesan Communications Officer so that information of such can be circulated. Guidance for preparing online services is available in the Parish Resources section of the Church of Ireland website <https://www.ireland.anglican.org>

Innovate – Many clergy and parishes have been implementing alternative ways to offer worship and spiritual support to individuals and their community. , As anxiety levels rise and people look for spiritual resources accessible at home to help them, parishes should have relevant resources for parishioners, including those without Internet access.

Daily prayers - Daily prayers can help give structure to our days for those who are housebound with more time for thinking and reflecting. You may wish to consider signposting people to the online resources at <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/prayer-worship/book-of-common-prayer/2004-texts/texts> and to produce local booklets to offer as *personal copies only* (please do not pass these around).

Prayer times – Parishes could consider setting up regular prayer times which people can join remotely rather than in person, using the church bell to sound the times of prayer, in addition to online conferencing facilities such as Skype, Facetime, Zoom, telephone prayer partners, in order to positively help establish a sense of corporate prayer and the strengthening of the praying community.

2. Pastoral Care

Clergy, Lay Readers and Diocesan Pastoral Assistants – The health and well-being of parish and diocesan clergy together with support staff and volunteers is of paramount importance, both for their own protection and for those they minister to. Those with underlying health conditions, those that develop symptoms, and those over 70 years of age should adhere to government guidance concerning self-isolation and should inform a neighboring member of the clergy or supervising member of clergy of their availability / unavailability in order to enable the continuation of pastoral ministry in the parish. Clergy are reminded to co-ordinate the provision of pastoral care in their parishes in cooperation with neighbouring clergy.

Home Communions – All Home Communions should have ceased until further notice.

Visitation Protocols – All pastoral visitations should have ceased until further notice. Instead Clergy and/or Diocesan Pastoral Assistants should contact those needing pastoral care in parishes by telephoning them. The hospital chaplains are no longer permitted to carry out hospital visits unless expressly invited to do so by hospital staff. Clergy who are asked to visit parishioners in hospital or residential care should only do so if permitted by the hospital/residential facility and with the consent of the individual's family. Hygiene and physical distancing measures must be observed.

Pastoral and practical support - Develop a plan for the pastoral and practical support of those who are vulnerable or housebound in the parish (the plan must of course adhere to safeguarding policies and hygiene practices). Consider developing a 'Love thy Neighbour' scheme for those in self-isolation with a team of volunteers to: Regularly contact by phone to alleviate loneliness; Report concerns as to their health; Collect urgent supplies & shopping; Post mail, etc. You may want to consider offering to hold next of kin details for parishioners who live alone, but make sure any such personal information is stored securely and you have the individual's permission to have these details in keeping with General Data Protection regulations. Identify and brief lay people who can provide telephone support and prayer for those who are fearful or otherwise distressed.

Self-isolated - For those who need to self-isolate, consider how people can be supported with phone calls and via social media, and help with the delivery of shopping and / or medication. It is very important that all church members involved in such support are very clear on and committed to adhering to the Government's isolation and general hygiene advice.

Weddings – Weddings should not take place; however, in **Northern Ireland** the Solemnisation of Marriages outdoors is now allowed, with the number of people attending limited to 10. For the period of this current crisis only, until marriages may once again be solemnised inside church buildings, clergy of the Church of Ireland in **Northern Ireland** may officiate at an outdoor marriage service in accordance with the Coronavirus Regulations. All such marriages must take place in the grounds of the church which, in normal circumstances, would have been used to solemnise the marriage. Careful attention is to be given to the restrictions in respect of the number of people present. Public health advice, social distancing, and hand sanitisation must also be observed.

Funerals – Funerals should not take place in Church buildings until further notice. In many parts of this country we have come to expect that a funeral service with burial/cremation will normally take place around the third day after death. With the coronavirus crisis that may not always be possible, especially if there are numerous deaths and the authorities come under severe pressure. Members of the clergy can continue to perform funeral liturgies and services at the graveside and where possible outdoors at the home of the deceased as soon as legally and practically possible, working with funeral directors and others as appropriate, strictly adhering to hygiene advice and physical distancing measures.

Funerals should be attended by family members only **up to a maximum of 10 in Northern Ireland and a maximum of 25 in the Republic of Ireland** in order to keep numbers in attendance low, it is strongly advisable that funeral arrangements (*time, date, venue*) are not publicly advertised in order to avoid large gatherings. Clergy should not visit the home of the deceased or the homes of the bereaved family other than to conduct a short funeral liturgy or service where possible outdoors at the home of the deceased. Funeral arrangements should be made by phone and/or email. Arrangements should at all times comply with physical distancing measures.

There should be no congregational singing, however background music could be offered where feasible. Hygiene advice and physical distancing should be strictly adhered to, physical contact including handshaking and funeral teas should not take place.

Copies of prayers for the sick and the dying and also a copy of the funeral service could be helpfully sent to those unable to attend the funeral of a friend or relative, as could an audio or video recording of the service where this is possible.

The option of holding a Thanksgiving Service, to take place at a future date when possible, should be offered to bereaved families.

This information has been issued by the diocese to a number of undertakers, however some may have been overlooked, therefore it is important to refer local undertakers active in your parochial area to these guidelines.

Mental Health and Hardship – Efforts should be made to support those who may be struggling with mental health issues and/or hardship. It will be important to take measures, such as regular phone communication, to help alleviate loneliness and despair.

3. Community Response

Volunteer Mobilisation – Volunteer support may be necessary for medical staff and for individuals in the community. Churches are well placed to channel information, particularly on requests for volunteers. Information will be circulated to clergy and parishes if and when available.

Public Reassurance – Clergy can offer important public reassurance through “the sacrament of presence” and being seen to be “present” and available. This does not include physically visiting those diagnosed with COVID-19 or those who are self-isolating: clergy need to protect themselves and others, making sure they adhere to physical distancing and hygiene precautions. Clergy can also be a trusted voice in a community and help with the distribution of government advice ensuring isolated members of the community are aware of the precautions they can take. Network as

appropriate with local health, welfare, safety networks, funeral directors and other service providers. Ensure contact details for these service providers are held by key parish leadership. Be aware of local information and peculiarities eg changes in public utilities or services that affect your community specifically.

4. Parish Administration

Premises - Churches and church halls are to remain closed to the public until further notice, with the exception of those parishes which choose to open their church for private prayer and/or their carpark for drive-in church services, **provided a risk assessment has been completed and that social distancing and hygiene regulations can be adhered to.** Parishes will be provided with further guidance directly in this regard.

Graveyards - The Northern Ireland Executive has given permission for the re-opening of cemeteries. So while we re-open our church graveyards and are pleased we can do so, we must continue to observe other Government Guidelines, encourage safe social distancing and that gates, if possible, are left open to avoid people having to use the handles of the gates to churchyards as they enter. A healthy mixture of care and sensitivity as our churchyards re-open for the benefit of those who are grieving and want to visit family graves is to be encouraged.

Easter Vestries – All Easter Vestry meetings should be deferred until further notice and existing officers should remain in post until circumstances allow. <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/parish-resources/609/guidance-in-respect-of-possible%22%20/1%20%22section-609%22>

Easter Vestry Annual Returns - Easter Vestry Annual Returns cannot be completed at present as a meeting of the Easter Vestry needs to have taken place in order to populate most of the answers on the returns, and at present Easter Vestry meetings cannot take place. Parishes will be advised by the Diocesan Office, if and when Easter Vestry meetings can be convened; this will be based on legal advice issued by the Church centrally in response to Government policy on the easing of restrictions.

Parish Annual Accounts - Select Vestries are at liberty, if they wish, to proceed to have their 2019 annual accounts completed in the appropriate manner for the parish concerned, and subsequently have the accounts considered and hopefully approved by the Select Vestry, whilst ensuring observation of Government restrictions. Select Vestries may find it useful to use email or post the draft accounts for circulation purposes and either phone calls, written communication, email or video conference to seek approval of the annual accounts from Select Vestry members. Please note it is the Select Vestry that consider and approve the annual accounts, not the Easter Vestry - the accounts are presented to the Easter Vestry by the outgoing Select Vestry. Once accounts have been approved by the Select Vestry they can be submitted to the Diocese and to the relevant charity regulator, taking care to ensure they fulfil any of the charity regulator requirements and deadlines in their respective jurisdiction. Certain parishes in the Republic of Ireland are not yet registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority and therefore do not have to submit their accounts to the Charities Regulatory Authority, but should continue to submit their annual accounts to the Diocese when possible.

Charity Returns – The charities regulators in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have both confirmed that organisations should follow government advice and that organisations will not be considered to be in contravention of the Act in this respect. Further information is available at <https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/news/covid-19-coronavirus-information/>

<https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/en/information-for-charities/coronavirus-covid-19-and-charities>

Select Vestries – All Select Vestry meetings should be deferred until further notice. Matters requiring urgent consideration by a Select Vestry should be considered using electronic means such as teleconferencing, email circulation.

Parish Organisations – All parish organisations should be cancelled until further notice.

Continuation of Ministry – A template document to facilitate the continuation of ministry in parishes has been circulated to clergy. Parishes that have not prepared and submitted these are asked to do so.

5. RCB Guidance

RCB Covid-19 Guidance is available online at <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/resources/?query=&categories=120>

- **Return to In-Church Worship Protocols for ROI and NI**
- **Guidance to Parish Treasurers on Invoice Redirection Fraud**
- **Keeping people safe from scams**
- **Guidance for Online Services and Audio-visual Content**
- **Covid-19 Resources for Family Activities**
- **Worship and Copyright**
- **Keeping your video conference secure**
- **Avoiding advertising and external content**
- **Organising an online service Guidance for the temporary closure of church buildings during Covid-19 Pandemic**
- **Covid-19: It's Still Open** (*template signs for churches*)
- **Insurance Considerations during Covid-19**
- **Irish Government Supports**
- **United Kingdom Government Supports**
- **Practical steps for Parish Treasurers and Select Vestries during Covid-19** (*The Diocese will communicate with parishes once action needs to be taken concerning Easter Vestry meetings*)
- **Guidance regarding Easter General Vestry meetings (Covid-19)**
- **Covid-19: Mission reflections, response and resources for parishes**
- **Responding to Covid-19: Photo Gallery**
- **Church of Ireland Guidance in relation to Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19)**
- **Church of Ireland Guidelines for the Church's response to Novel Coronavirus**

6. Diocesan Office

The Diocesan Office remains closed to visitors. However, staff are available daily for telephone and/or email enquiries.

Diocesan Office – Mrs J Kirkland - 028 3752 2858 office@armagh.anglican.org

Diocesan Secretary- Mrs J Leighton – 028 3752 2858 secretary@armagh.anglican.org

Archbishop's Office – Mrs P Hutton – 028 3752 7144 abpsecretary@armagh.anglican.org

Communications Officer & Magazine Editor – J Hull – 07703821533 dco@armagh.anglican.org
Safeguarding & Compliance Officer – D Scott – 07510914192 safeguarding@armagh.anglican.org
Diocesan Architect – S Leighton – 028 9261 3700 (O) 07710 857334 (M)
office@leightonjohnston.com

7. Communications

Diocesan Magazine – A free digital version of the most recent edition of the Diocesan Magazine is available on the diocesan website at <http://www.armagh.anglican.org/Magazine/>

Unfortunately, hard copies of the magazine will not be produced currently. Parishes may wish to print off hard copies or sections of the magazine from the online version in order to provide copies to those within their parish who are unable to access the magazine online.

Information and Guidance – The Diocesan website will be used as the principle point of communication to provide regular updates for parishes and the general public. Information will also be made available through the Diocesan Facebook page and through press releases. Information particularly for the attention of parishes and clergy will be circulated via email.

Reaching out – Parishes, with their own websites and Facebook pages and those without these are welcome to use the Diocesan Website and Facebook Page to communicate the latest advice to parishioners and worshippers. Please email dco@armagh.anglican.org with information.

8. Diocesan Diary

All diocesan meetings and training events have been cancelled until further notice.