

**GUIDANCE REGARDING
CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**

Version 8

Updated 6 August 2020



Brothers and sisters in Christ,

As you will be aware, the situation regarding the Coronavirus pandemic is constantly changing, and this guidance will be updated accordingly as the need arises.

Update on the wearing of masks

**Message from
His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos**

“Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). This verse leads us, in the spirit of serving one another, to place the needs and protection of others before our own interests, comfort and convenience.

Following updated national guidance, the wearing of masks or appropriate face coverings during services is now a mandatory requirement to minimise the risk of infection among all taking part.

I thank you all for your patience and faithfulness in adhering to everything that has been asked of you so far, and remind you that in following this guidance, we do so in order to safeguard the well-being of all those taking part in our church services, especially those most vulnerable.

My prayer is that we journey safely through this challenging time together, and rejoice once again very soon in one another’s company in our churches once this has all passed.”

Key Updated Guidance

- **Masks:** All those attending church services are required to bring and wear their own masks or appropriate face coverings
- **Holy Communion:** Masks should be removed in preparation for the receiving of Holy Communion
- **Cantors, deacons, choir:** Those serving in the Sanctuary and in the chorus are required to wear masks for the duration of the service

As you will be aware, the situation regarding Coronavirus is changing on an almost daily basis, and the Diocese will keep you informed as the need arises.

WELCOME HOME

'Planned Resumption of Services as of 4 July 2020'

The World Health Organisation has deemed COVID-19 as a pandemic, and as of 19 June 2020, the UK Government COVID-19 alert level moved from 'level 4' to 'level 3'¹ allowing the resumption of services in Places of Worship to take place as of 4 July 2020. The guidance below will be updated as and when the situation changes.

Before attending your parish

Members of congregations, volunteers and clergy must not attend parishes under any circumstances if they have any symptoms (even mild) of COVID-19, including:

- A high temperature
- A new continuous cough (non-chronic)
- A loss or change to sense of smell or taste

Registration and Reservation Process

In order to be able to attend Liturgies, congregation members need to complete a two-step process:

- **Registration** – registering church membership via www.MyChurch.London
- **Reservation** – accessing an online booking system when it becomes available, and as directed by parishes, to reserve a place to attend Liturgies

Protecting the vulnerable

- **People aged 70 or older**, regardless of medical conditions may be at increased risk. Parishes will communicate any special arrangements being made
- **Those who have been advised by The NHS to 'shield'** should not use the reservation system, but are advised to contact their parish priest directly

General Information: Resumption of Services

- As of 4 July 2020 the Clergy Council agreed that up to three Liturgies shall be celebrated per week in each parish. One service will take place on Saturday, one on Sunday and one mid-week. Services will be celebrated by one member of clergy only
- Mid-week liturgies will be left at the discretion of the parishes to agree a day and time, and cleaning and sanitisation measures will always be taken into account
- Attendance in parishes will be dependent on the size of the congregation, social distancing measures in place and any changes to National Guidance
- **There will be a single Liturgical Service streamed from each parish on Sundays only**
- **To ensure the safety of those attending in our parishes, you are asked to leave directly after services and for this reason, catering is currently suspended in all our parishes.**

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/update-from-the-uk-chief-medical-officers-on-the-uk-alert-level>

Attending your Parish

Social Distancing

- A 2-metre distance between individuals (except members of a single household) must be maintained when entering, inside, and exiting the church, including outdoors on church premises
- Members of a single household will be encouraged to sit together, and be at least 2 metres apart from those outside their household

Minimising the risk of infection

- Following increased national conversation on the wearing of masks, a consultation was held with the Clergy Council, the Medical Response Group and the Diocesan Response Group, and the outcome is as follows, until further notice:
 - **Masks:** All those attending church services are required to bring and wear their own masks or appropriate face coverings
 - **Holy Communion:** Masks should be removed in preparation for the receiving of Holy Communion
 - **Cantors, deacons, choir:** Those serving in the Sanctuary and in the chorus are required to wear masks for the duration of the service
- As directed by stewards, all members must use hand sanitiser provided at the doors on entry and when leaving the premises
- Congregation must refrain from touching or venerating icons or sacred objects, and greeting Clergy in the traditional manner

Items used during Liturgy

- **The wearing of masks in places of worship is now a mandatory requirement. Please bring and wear your own mask or appropriate face covering for use during church services.**
- Gloves worn prior to entering the church should be discarded as these cannot be safely sanitised. New gloves can be worn if placed on hands after sanitisation at the door
- Liturgical books will not be provided
- If those attending wish to use a Communion corporal (lefafa), or headscarves for ladies, they must bring their own and these cannot be shared
- Attendees should bring their own water, as there will be no water provided for the dispensation of Holy Communion
- Donations should be made electronically where possible and cash can only be accepted if placed directly into the donation box

Sharing the Greeting of Peace during Liturgy

- **Due to the current heightened risk factor, sharing the greeting of peace at the end of the Prayer of Reconciliation will be temporarily suspended**

Communion

Clergy Council Decision on the Administering of the Eucharist

After meeting and deliberating with the clergy of the Diocese on the matter of the administration of Communion, His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, on behalf of the Clergy Council, stated:

“We have unwavering faith that bread and wine mystically and mysteriously change into the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and are confident in the healing and life-giving power of this Sacrament. It is important to stress however, that the nature of the Sacrament is different to the means of its distribution.

It is familiar practice, in the pastoral ministry of the Church to her children, to appropriately adapt the process of administering the Sacraments in challenging situations, if and when the need arises.

On this basis, and with concern for the health and wellbeing of the most vulnerable in our communities, we will be temporarily administering the Body and Blood together, as we do daily throughout the Coptic Orthodox Church around the world for those unable to personally attend Liturgies. This is a temporary measure in response to these extraordinary circumstances, and our usual practice will be reinstated once the risk period has passed.”

Other Church Services

Baptisms

Baptisms should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to.

Weddings

Marriage ceremonies should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to. See more detail in the [Guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)

Funerals

Funerals should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to. See more detail in the [COVID-19: guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic](#).

Ministries, Meetings and Christian Education

For the time being, all of our: Church meetings, Bible studies, fellowship meetings, prayer meetings, Sunday School, Sunday School activities and any other related meeting will continue to be delivered using a virtual platform. Please ask your parish for details

Background Information

We continue to pray for all those directly and indirectly affected by the current COVID-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak, as well as for their families, loved ones and communities.

We would like to once again reassure our congregations that The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of London has established a Medical Response Group that closely monitors information and guidance from Public Health England (PHE), including Government briefings from Downing Street, the Chief Medical Officer, and other relevant authorities. This includes working closely with Coptic Orthodox dioceses and other denominational groups in Britain as well as medical practitioners and policy advisers, to

ensure a coordinated response within our Churches, keep communities safe, and put plans in place to manage any risks safely and proportionately.

We have also established two new groups to ensure that services are provided for all those in need:

- The first is the **Diocesan Response Group (DRG)**. This is a cross-diocese group that looks towards the strategies of supporting the diocese, parishes and individuals, and to provide a network for all those assisting in a variety of ways.
- The second is our **Diocesan Digital Platforms Group (DDP)**. This is again a cross-diocese group that has been instrumental in the establishment of the various digital platforms providing services ranging from Sunday School to prayer meetings and Liturgies, and is currently taking the lead on preparations for the sharing of Holy Week and the Holy Resurrection Feast prayers and resources.

Welcome Home Handbook

Parishes have received, are implementing and communicating guidance found in a twenty seven page 'Welcome Home Handbook' developed by the Diocesan Response Group (DRG), a cross-parish network of clergy and parish representatives, under the care of His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London. It sets out mandatory Diocesan guidelines and offers recommendations to support parishes in implementing adjustments needed to comply with government policy and to keep our congregations safe. To ensure the safety of all, parishes are requested to abide by Diocesan Guidelines, whereas recommendations can be implemented with discretion if determined to be useful. The handbook incorporates National Guidance received through the direct or delegated relationships and interactions of His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos with official interactions with Downing Street, The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), The London Faith Advisory Group, The London Church Leaders Group, The Metropolitan Police, and other official and ecumenical bodies. As national guidance is constantly changing, the handbook is subject to updates and the Diocese will alert parishes to any potential amendments through the ongoing work of the DRG.

Pastoral Message from His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London

Welcome home!

I have missed you all dearly, and it is wonderful to be gradually restoring services in our parishes, which have been our homes for so long. As we return, we will all be rejoicing with the Psalmist saying "How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord" (Psalm 84:1-2).

In anticipation, many have been working tirelessly for the past three months to prepare for your safe and joyous return, and due to the challenges we are all too aware of, you will find some things a little different for a while, as we have had to adapt some of our practices to keep everyone safe. We have dedicated Diocesan Medical and Response Groups which have been considering medical opinion and government guidance to ensure that we adopt best practices, and that we can return to our parishes as quickly and safely as possible.

Our parishes have recently been open for private individual prayer, and now I am overjoyed that our Liturgical services can resume as of the 4 July 2020.

Our Clergy Council and Diocesan Response Group have also been working behind the scenes to ensure that you are welcomed home in a safe, friendly, fair and efficient manner.

In these extraordinary times, I ask that you please be patient and remember that everyone is doing their best to make the transition as smooth as possible. I am sure you will join me in thanking all those who have worked hard to facilitate our services and return to the church during this challenging period.

All our clergy and servants, who are also experiencing the same challenges we all are, are here to help, and so I ask that you please co-operate and work with them for your own safety and that of others. If you have any suggestions or queries, please do share them with the relevant servants.

I assure you of my prayers, and look forward to seeing and praying with you all soon, and once again,
Once again Welcome Home!

+Angaelos
Servant of the See of London

Important Information:

(Source: NHS.uk) - Coronavirus (COVID-19) can make anyone seriously ill. But for some people, the risk is higher. There are 2 levels of higher risk:

- high risk (clinically extremely vulnerable)
- moderate risk (clinically vulnerable)
- For detailed information on this please visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/>

If you need general medical assistance or guidance, use the 111 online coronavirus service or call 111 to find out what to do next. In case of medical emergency please dial 999

- **Current NHS Guidance:** www.NHS.uk/Coronavirus
- **Government information:** <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>