

St. Michael's Church, Ashford.

Parish Update

The following guide will help you know what to expect when you come to Mass.

Weekend Schedule

- *Saturday* 6.00 pm - Mass 'live' **online-only** (with music)

- *Sunday* 9.15 am - Mass in the church (limited capacity*)
 6.00 pm - Mass in the church (limited capacity*)

Please note that the church will be closed after 9.15 am Mass and NOT RE-OPEN until the Evening Mass in order to facilitate cleaning.

Weekday Mass and Private Prayers

- Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays - the church is open 4.00 - 6.00 pm for Private Prayers, followed by Mass at 6.00 pm (limited capacity*)

Please note that the church will be closed after Mass in order to facilitate cleaning.

We will constantly review the schedule, identify difficulties, and make any necessary changes.

Managing expectations

After over three months of living very differently, many of us will long to get back to 'normal' church, with all the familiar sights and sounds, old faces, and happy careless atmosphere. Unfortunately, we have not reached a point where this will be possible – we are still in 'Corona Time', and we may be for some time to come. And so the immediate objective of 're-opening' is simply to restore access to the Eucharist, the central act of our faith, not (unfortunately) to restore parish life as we've come to know it. That will just have to wait!

***Limited capacity**

Our church building usually seats 230-250 in a single jolt. However, during **Corona Time** our capacity will be very limited indeed - **roughly 42 - 50 people** depending on whether most come as individuals, family groups or 'bubbles'. This is to allow space for safe distancing. If the church reaches '**COVID capacity**' we'll have to say "Bingo, Full House" or "please come back later", which might mean coming to a weekday Mass instead.

The main church door will be opened 15 minutes before the start of Mass (on Sundays) and will be closed once capacity inside the church is reached. I ask that you please respect this and follow guidance from the stewards. Please understand that we cannot exceed the numbers.

Entry will be on a 'first come, first served' basis.

No obligation

Sunday obligation is not yet back on which means that **the restoration of public Mass does not bring with it the obligation to attend Mass.** This is good because we won't be able to fit

everyone in. So 'going' to Mass online or attending a weekday Mass instead is absolutely fine at this present time.

Consider a weekday Mass instead:

Maybe you feel uncomfortable around a large number of people – why not come to weekday Mass instead?

Mass online will continue:

All Masses will continue to be live-streamed (broadcast online) on Facebook. Please note that the **Saturday at 6.00 pm Vigil Mass** is *ONLINE only*.

Short and simple

As a large gathering is currently a high-risk environment, it's important to minimise the time we spend celebrating Mass – so Mass will be short, approximately 30 minutes – with no music, but don't get too used to that, because it won't be like this forever!

Singing

Due to the increased range of infected droplets, while singing takes place, we have been instructed that there is to be no singing during Mass. Music will continue at the 'online only' Saturday 6.00 pm Vigil Mass, which can, of course, be attended on catch-up the next day if you wish to listen to Mass on Sunday.

Face Coverings and Social Distancing

We are keeping to the 2m social distance in church for the time being and so the wearing of a face covering (mask) remains optional.

We will leave alternate rows empty in the church and will restrict the number of persons allowed per bench. This rule does not apply to persons living in the same household or 'bubble'. *The Stewards will guide you.*

If the need arises in forthcoming weeks, then we will use the '1 metre plus' rule that will allow us to accommodate more people in the church. *Masks may then become obligatory.*

Stewarding

At weekend Masses we will deploy a team of Stewards. In order to maximise capacity within safe distancing guidelines, the stewards may ask you to sit in a specific place. Please follow their instruction as it is for the benefit of us all.

Entry and Exit

Entry will be **via the main church door only**. Please do not use the Side Entrance to come into the church. Exit (weekends only) will be straight after Communion via the Side Entrance and the Main Entrance. *The Stewards will guide you.*

Please do not congregate in large groups outside the church and always maintain Social Distancing.

Candles

You may go to Our Lady's Chapel to light a candle (*except on Sundays and after the Masses on weekdays - for we need to clean the church after mass for the next opening*). Make your way up the centre aisle and exit via the side aisle.

Toilets

Toilets **will not** be available at this time.

Cleaning

The church will need to be cleaned after every celebration of Mass. If you are able to help, please reply to the request posted on the **St. Michael's Community** Facebook page or email me at ashford@rcdow.org.uk

Holy Communion (for Sunday Mass)

Holy Communion will be distributed at Mass, but with some small changes.

- **Distribution of Holy Communion will be after the final blessing, allowing all to receive the Lord and then exit the church.**

Those sitting on the left side of the church will proceed up the SIDE AISLE towards the Side Entrance and

Those sitting on the right side of the church will proceed down the SIDE AISLE towards the Main Entrance, starting from the back row. (Please follow guidance from the Stewards)

- **Please maintain a safe distance from the person in front of you when waiting to receive Holy Communion.**
- **The Minister will not speak – and nor will you! Please maintain your distance from the Minister by outstretching your hands to receive Communion.**
- **The Minister will wash their hands before and after Holy Communion, and also in cases of accidental finger contact.**
- **Holy Communion will only be given in the hand (not on the tongue).**
- **Holy Communion will only be available as the Body of Christ – the Blood of Christ will still not be available.**
- *Please do not congregate in large groups outside the church and always maintain Social Distancing.*

Holy Communion (weekday Mass)

The distribution of Holy Communion will take place as normal during Mass but please observe the points above (for Sunday Mass) – to maintain a safe distance from the person in front of you and to receive the Host in silence.

The Collection

The collection will not be taken up during Mass. Instead, please place your offering (cash or envelopes) in the brown box as you enter the church or there will be an **Exit Collection** by each door as you leave the church.

I would encourage everyone who can to donate by Standing Order or direct bank payment – as this minimises cash handling. Please email ashford@rcdow.org.uk for details. I thank you for your continued support for the parish.

Mass Intentions

Please place your Mass Intention envelope in the brown box in the church entrance or post through the presbytery letterbox.

Thank you for your understanding.

This 'new normal' seems to be working fine, so far.

I thank you for your patience, understanding and enthusiasm in helping each other in these new times. Glad to hear from the Steward's, about your patience in following the norms, kindness in allowing them to guide and also, I have heard that we have not reached the stage where they have had to turn people away because of the church being full at any Mass.

It is good to see many of you at weekday Mass, perhaps looking to avoid being in a fuller church on a Sunday.