

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

**Version 12
Updated 14 December 2021**



Brothers and sisters in Christ,

The guidance below pertains to everything as of 15 December 2021 unless otherwise specified. 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.

The most notable change to this guidance is that the wearing of masks in our Liturgies and all activities in our parishes is now a legal requirement until further notice.

Message from His Eminence Archbishop Angelos

My dear fathers, sisters and brothers, children in the Lord. I wish you grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ as we prepare to receive and celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These past two years have undoubtedly been one of challenge and much sacrifice but it is also a time through which we have grown individually and together to understand the meaning of our common journey and what it is to look after one another, for indeed in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself are that, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13), even if 'this laying down of one's life' means making sacrifices and choosing the comfort of others before our own.

What we are witnessing around us gives some indication that there is a very clear hope of a return to some normality in the not-too-distant future, but we are not quite there yet. As lockdown restrictions are constantly evolving it has so far been left to the discretion of each individual, and organisation, to act in the best way possible to maintain the vigilance we have kept over the past months. This includes our Church and our parishes and the services we provide. One of the things we have missed most is gathering and I am overjoyed that our fellowship meetings, Christian education, Sunday school services, and agape hospitality services have resumed for some time now. We are also thankful that we have been able to increase the number of Liturgies and the capacity of our parishes as we move forward. We would like to keep things that way for as long as possible.

We have been in conversation with our various groups within the Diocese to ascertain a way forward considering new national restrictions coming into place regarding the wearing of masks, and we would ask that you please continue to be patient with us throughout this process. While we all want to return to our pre-Covid lifestyles, we understand that there will be a variety of ways in which people will need to respond to the ongoing situation, based on their health, vulnerability, and experience. Some people have sadly lost loved ones while others have suffered illness themselves, so we must all be wise and mindful of every individual, recognising that there will be a need for us all to accommodate for each other during this transitional period. That is why at this time, alongside developing national

guidance, we would kindly ask that you wear masks at all church services and during all other ministry activity taking place in our parishes and/or on their premises.

We continue to pray protection and healing upon our world as we pray for God's guidance and wisdom in navigating these months ahead, confident that He is our hope and our joy, and in Him there is fullness of life.

As I continue to move through our parishes, I look forward to seeing and praying with you over this Advent period, and over the coming weeks and months.

WELCOME HOME GUIDANCE

As per [Government Guidance on 10 December 2021](#), it is expected that all should wear masks in enclosed spaces. **“Face coverings are required by law in most indoor public places, including our places of worship”** As our parishes are now at higher capacity, and difficult to ventilate throughout the winter months, it makes sense to help mitigate the risk of the virus spreading through the wearing of masks.

The guidance below will be updated as and when the situation changes.

Before attending your parish

According to current government guidance, members of congregations, volunteers and clergy who have Covid-19 symptoms, should stay at home, and have a PCR test. Symptoms include:

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

Registration and Reservation Process

Due to the ongoing uncertainty surrounding Covid-19 restrictions and easements, and so as to ensure that parishes are not attended beyond capacity, which would increase the risk due to the closed space and length of service, we will be maintaining our current reservation system through the MyChurch App.

We will however be gradually increasing capacity in our parishes, aiming to reach the maximum seating capacity, as deemed safe according to each parish's ongoing risk assessment, within one month. So as to ensure a safe flow within the church space, there will be no standing in the aisles.

In order to be able to attend Liturgies, congregation members need to continue, for the time being, to complete a two-step process:

- **Registration** - registering church membership via www.MyChurch.London
- **Reservation** - accessing the MyChurch reservation system to reserve a place to attend available Liturgies, Vespers or any other services (as they become available).

We will be easing some restrictions at the parish level, which will be announced locally, including potentially allowing attendance at your secondary parish.

General Information: Resumption of Services

- As of 19 July 2021, the frequency of Liturgies and vespers continues to be left to the discretion of parishes to agree a day and time.

- Cleaning and sanitisation measures will continue to be observed.
- Attendance in parishes will be dependent on the seating capacity of the church space, and any changes to National Guidance.
- Liturgical Services will continue to be streamed from each parish on Sundays, and on other occasions as determined by parishes.

Attending your Parish

Social Distancing

- As of 19 July 2021, there have not been any restrictions on social distancing, however, households and families are encouraged to sit together.

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: It is currently a legal requirement to wear masks or face coverings in places of worship; it is therefore a Diocesan policy that masks/face coverings be used throughout liturgies and during other activities in our parishes to safeguard everyone involved. We would ask attendees to be mindful of one another during, before and after services.

- **Holy Communion:** In line with risk assessment carried out at the time, as of 15 May 2021, Communion screens have been removed; this may change as the need arises or national guidance changes
 - **Cantors, deacons, choir:** Those serving in the Sanctuary and in the chorus are required to wear masks for the duration of the service.
 - The sanctuary will continue to be served by a maximum of 4 deacons.
 - The number of choir members and their positioning will be left at the discretion of the parish according to the seating capacity of the choir area.
 - **Dedicated Socially-Distanced Liturgies:** Notwithstanding all of this guidance, there will be a mid-week liturgy in each parish which will be held for those vulnerable or at risk, or anyone else who wishes to attend a socially distanced service. These services will safeguard a space for those who wish to maintain the wearing of masks, social distancing, and other preventative measures. This arrangement will be reviewed on a monthly basis.
- Hand sanitiser will remain available at the entrance and exit of the Church.
 - Congregation members are still encouraged to refrain from touching or venerating icons or sacred objects for the time being.

Items used during Liturgy

- Congregants are encouraged to use the Diocesan Liturgy book which is now available through the parishes, via the MyChurch App on personal devices during Liturgies.
- 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

- For the time being, sharing the greeting of peace at the end of the Prayer of Reconciliation remains temporarily suspended

Communion

Clergy Council Decision on the Administering of the Eucharist

The Distribution of Holy Communion, remains unchanged from previous versions of this guidance and is outlined below:

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, Weddings and Funerals

The number of attendees at Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals will only be limited by the capacity of the church according to parish risk assessment.

Ministries, Meetings and Christian Education

As of 11 July 2021, Church meetings, Bible studies, fellowship meetings, prayer meetings and any other related meetings have resumed according to each parish's risk assessment without any need for social distancing. The wearing of masks is now legally required during all of the above.

Catering

As of 19 July 2021, hospitality is able to be offered with services. Where possible, this should be offered outdoors in order to minimise risk to attendees.

Indoor and Outdoor Services

As of 19 July 2021, indoor and outdoor services are not subject to any social distancing restrictions

and will be conducted according to the risk assessments carried out by each parish.

In some cases, these services, whether indoor or outdoor will need to be supplemented by virtual meetings for those unable to attend. This will be left to the discretion of the parish.

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.

Our Diocesan Covid Response Groups continue 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.

Welcome Home Handbook

Parishes have received, and continue to implement and communicate 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.

Important Information:

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

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

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.