



St John Fisher Catholic Church

North Harrow



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Stewarding update – May 2021

Once again thank you for your continued dedication and support for your parish and your fellow parishioners. The vaccination program in the UK has been a great success so far and we are seeing a continued downward trend in Covid infections and, most importantly fatalities. Nevertheless, the situation is not positive in many other parts of the world, with the situation in India and Brazil of special concern at present. We pray for our brothers and sisters in India, Brazil and other parts of the world who are suffering, and we must continue to do everything possible to keep our own community safe until this pandemic is under control everywhere.

As mentioned in my previous newsletter, the UK government has set out a 4 step guide for the re-opening of services and venues, including places of worship in England, with the next step (3) on May 17th. Amongst other things, this will result in no limits to the number of people attending funerals, with a limit of 30 on weddings, baptisms, receptions, and other life cycle events. We have already relaxed some of the parish Covid protocols and procedures, (seating & church exit), and it's important that we gradually relax them further (details below) in line with Step 3 timelines and as the risk of infection decreases.

At this time, we do not know what restrictions the UK Government will lift from June 21st (step 4) onwards but we must start preparing our parish for this date, even if many of the restrictions will remain in place. Part of this preparation means gradually working over the coming months to pass the responsibility of some of the current Covid safety measures (hand gelling, mask wearing & safe distancing) from stewards back to parishioners. We have been managing services since the church re opened, after the first lockdown, in July last year, so we will do this in a phased and safe way that avoids confusion and alarm, keeping an eye out for any spikes in infection numbers, so that we are ready to re-introduce stricter, managed measures if needed.

There will be some confusion amongst parishioners and individual mistakes will be made during this period, so we will continue to be reliant on all of you to help guide your fellow parishioners, at all masses, to follow the correct procedures in place at the time.

Covid Protocol Changes from Monday 17th May Onwards

As of 17th May onwards, the following changes to procedures will be introduced:

Cleaning – Benches and kneelers will continue to be cleaned after each service, but we will no longer mop the bench floors. The floors (aisles and between benches) will only be cleaned as part of the deep clean on Wednesdays.

Holy Communion Hand Gel

We will continue to monitor parishioners as they enter the church and remind them to hand gel, but we will not have stewards distributing hand gel before and after communion adjacent to the altar. Instead either Fr Axcel or myself will communicate before communion starts, reminding parishioners of their obligation to hand gel before and after receiving communion, in order to safeguard their parish priests and their fellow parishioners.

Holy Communion Stewarding

We will continue to need a steward to initiate the procession to communion using the one way system but our aim is to gradually get parishioners used to managing this process themselves, with direction from the priests, so that in time it becomes automatic to them in the same way that the pre Covid, bench by bench process worked. At this time, we don't know if we will be able to revert back to the pre Covid communion route, using the central aisle, by June 21st but we will start to encourage parishioners to take responsibility for taking the current bench by bench one way route, regardless of whether they will have to use the current one way system or central aisle post June 21st. We will keep you updated on these changes.

Weekend Masses Bi-Weekly to Weekly Booking

We introduced a bi-weekly booking system for the two most popular services (Saturday 6pm & Sunday 10.30) to better manage the additional demand for mass attendance over the Easter period. With the re-introduction of the old seating system and the extra capacity that enables, we now feel it is time to scrap the bi-weekly booking system and revert back to weekly booking for these two masses. The last masses where we will take bi-weekly bookings will be on the weekend of 8th & 9th May, with weekly booking only from 15th & 16th May.

As a reminder, the old seating system was the system we used when the church re opened in July 2020 through to the start of the last lockdown. This enabled us to be more flexible seating parishioners as long as we ensured they were a safe distance apart. An example of the way we can now seat parishioners from different social bubbles/groups is:

Large Bench – 3 x 1 person or group of 2 plus group of 3 or group of 4 + 1 person

Medium Bench – 2 x 1 person, or group of 2 plus group of 2, or group of 3 + 1 person
Small Bench (side aisle) – 1 person, or group of 2 to 4

The new seating system covers all masses and should benefit both the weekday masses which are attended by more single parishioners or groups of two, and weekend masses where we have more larger family groups attending.

Lastly, we still need your continued support whilst we (hopefully) transition out of the current restrictions. I understand that people are fatigued, and I appreciate the efforts that everyone has made but there has been a reduction in steward numbers since Easter and the burden of ensuring proper coverage has fallen on a few individuals. I encourage you all to help us get through this, especially with the potential for better days around the corner. One of the measures we are looking to help with communication is introducing a Stewards WhatsApp group so that we can better communicate as a group and help to ensure better coverage at all masses. St Luke's in Pinner have introduced it and found it very helpful. If you are able to join this group, please email Nuala (nualarodger@rcdow.org.uk) in the parish office with your mobile/smart phone number and you will be added to the group.

I am sorry that I can't yet be clearer on the measures that the parish will have to take from June 21st onwards but as you can see from the news these plans change on a regular basis. There may well be certain restrictions in place beyond June, but they will hopefully require far less management than currently. The priests in Harrow are actively seeking advice from the diocese, through our dean, on the guidance applying to our churches after 17th May, as further changes are introduced, we will ensure that you are informed of these as early as possible.

Wishing every blessing on you and your families in these challenging times,



Fr Graham Stokes
Parish Priest