

Guidance for Funerals

Introduction

The Government has announced that from 4th July 2020, communal acts of worship will be allowed in our Catholic Churches. This guidance, issued by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for the Celebration of Funerals, assumes that the general guidance published by the Conference, based on Government Guidance on the safe opening of Places of Worship for individual prayer, is in place.¹ In particular, the number and position of people within the church at any one time should be overseen by volunteer stewards.

The Guidance offered by the Bishops' Conference for the Celebration of Mass should also be observed as Requiem Masses as well as Funeral Services can now be celebrated.

Social Distancing - IMPORTANT

The Government maintains that the 2m social distancing requirements should be applied where possible. The Government has said is possible to go to "1m plus;" this means you can space people more closely (with a minimum of 1m) providing a mitigation of risk is also applied. In the case of our churches, this would mean the compulsory wearing of a face covering for members of the congregation.² If those on the sanctuary are sufficiently distant from the congregation, there is no need for them to wear face coverings.

Priests should remain mindful of their own personal situation with respect to potential exposure to virus transmission. See the Guidance for the Celebration of Mass document for additional details.

Funerals

The Government guidance on the Opening of Churches for Public Worship requires that the number of people attending Funerals is **capped at 30 people**.³

Parishes are encouraged to live-stream Funeral Services and Requiem Masses so that those who cannot attend may unite themselves to the worship in Church and pray for the deceased and the consolation of the mourners.

Before the Service

There should be good collaboration between the family of the deceased, the funeral director and the clergy to ensure that the numbers of people assembling in the church is limited to the immediate family and those very close to the deceased.⁴ Any interaction with the family should be done safely – this may mean by telephone, Skype, Zoom etc.

It is important to consider the following issues before the service:

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-easing-of-lockdown-restrictions-23-june-2020>

³ Funerals should have no more than 30 people in attendance. Attendance should also be within the capacity limits of the premises so that social distancing can be strictly adhered to. In some cases that may be less than 30 people. See more detail in the COVID-19:guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

1. Who can attend? As a principle, numbers should be minimised as far as possible and no more than 30 people. Alongside the member of clergy, Funeral Director and staff, the government advises that only the following should attend:
 - members of the person's household
 - close family members
 - or if the above are unable to attend, close friendsIt is important that anyone attending should not exhibit any symptoms of COVID-19 or place themselves at risk. See the Government guidance (footnote 4).
2. The usual guidance on hygiene, hand sanitising and people with symptoms not attending church, as set out in the guidelines for opening for individual prayer, applies.

Preparing the Church for the service

Hand sanitisers should be signposted, readily available and easily accessible. Notices should be clearly placed advising people of correct hygiene practices. Consideration should be given as to the flow of groups in and out of the church to minimise any risk of compromising physical distancing, avoiding overlap between different groups while also leaving time for adequate cleaning. The Church should be well ventilated, preferably by opening windows and doors where possible.

If a Requiem Mass is to be celebrated, then the preparations should follow the Guidance for the Celebration of Mass in terms of preparing the credence table and elements for Holy Communion.

Safeguarding the Priest/Deacon/Minister from infection

Clergy should remain mindful of their own personal hygiene, sanitising/washing their hands before and after the service and again after the committal. Physical contact with mourners and the coffin containing the body is to be avoided.

Physical contact

While it is contrary to human instinct and normal pastoral practice, it is important to advise mourners that there should be no physical contact including shaking hands, hugging or kissing outside their own households.

Reception of Remains

The coffin should be brought into the church on a trolley, supplied by the Funeral Directors, and should be manoeuvred by them alone. There should be no placing of a funeral pall over the coffin or the Christian symbols, flowers or other objects. These may be placed near the coffin by the minister.

During the Service

At this time, there should be no singing.⁵ Single-use service sheets can be provided which the participants should take with them as they leave the church. In light of the Government advice, additional people are not encouraged to attend the service.

If the family are to participate in the Liturgy of the Word, then they should use hand sanitiser before and after reading from the Lectern or be provided with single use gloves. They should avoid unnecessary contact with any microphone or the prepared Lectionary or the book containing the Prayer of the Faithful. Portable microphones should not be used or passed from hand to hand.

If there is a Requiem Mass, it is important for the celebrant to explain to the congregation the mode of receiving communion. He should be assisted by the stewards to direct people safely to receive

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>

Holy Communion at the appropriate time. Care should be taken by those moving around the church at this time, especially in the proximity of the coffin.

Incense should not be used at funerals as this can promote coughing in people which increases the risk of viral transmission. If the celebrant uses Holy Water as part of the reception of the coffin or final commendation, he should take care that it is not splashed onto the congregation or those near the coffin.⁶

After the Service

The church should be closed after the funeral has finished in order to clean the space according to the Bishops' Conference guidelines on individual prayer. Those cleaning afterwards should wear appropriate equipment (gloves/apron) as set out in the guidance on opening churches for individual prayer.

If there is cause for concern regarding the possible contamination of clerical vestments, these should be washed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, using the warmest water setting allowed for the fabric and allowing time for them to dry completely.

The Committal

The management of people at the place of committal comes under the local regulations of the cemetery or the crematorium, and these should be observed.

Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas
13th July 2020
Revision 7

⁶ From HMG Guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic:

Where rituals or ceremonies require water to be applied to the body, small volumes can be splashed onto the body, but full immersion should be avoided. Others present should move out of range of any potential splashing.