



Diocese of Down and Connor  
Updated guidelines on the celebration of Funerals services, Requiem Mass  
and distribution of Holy Communion  
4<sup>th</sup> June 2020

*Funerals services, Requiem Mass and distribution of Holy Communion*

On 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations, Northern Ireland 2020 came into effect.

The regulations and legislation enacted by the NI Executive introduced restrictions on individuals' daily lives and on the pastoral activities of all church bodies.

By way of exception to the restrictions on worship, provision was made for funerals in church, with no more than ten people in attendance, while observing social distancing regulations.

In the Diocese of Down and Connor a decision was made on 25<sup>th</sup> March to restrict funerals to the Committal service at the graveside with the possibility of the celebration of a Requiem Mass in the parish, either immediately before the Committal or at some other suitable time, without the presence of the deceased and mourners.

This difficult decision was taken, and explained by me, for the benefit of all, in the face of evidence that the Covid-19 Coronavirus could decimate clusters of the population, especially in urban areas.

Since the introduction of restrictions, given;

- the gradual and welcome decline in the number of Covid-19 related deaths,
- the decrease in the "R" number (the measure of virus transition),
- the incremental relaxation of restrictions by the NI Executive on 15<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> May and 4<sup>th</sup> June<sup>1</sup>,
- having sought the views of clergy in a diocesan survey<sup>2</sup> and
- having consulted with the Council of Priests<sup>3</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> (a) 15<sup>th</sup> May: Marriage in church of those a partner or an immediate member of a family is terminally ill, and (b) 19<sup>th</sup> May: allowing private individual prayer in a church (c) 4<sup>th</sup> June: permitting outdoor weddings

<sup>2</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020 Survey Results

<sup>3</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020

- (1) Funeral Services and Requiem Mass in the presence of the deceased and 10 mourners, whilst observing social distancing regulations, is now permitted across the diocese.
- (2) Distribution of Holy Communion during a Requiem Mass

Distribution of Holy Communion during a Requiem Mass should be managed with the utmost attention to hygiene and minimal contact. The celebrant should consider the following;

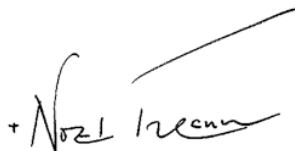
- consecration of hosts sufficient for the occasion to minimise contact with other hard surfaces e.g. the tabernacle,
- sanitising of priest's hands before and after (and if necessary during) distribution of Holy Communion with alcohol-based hand gel or washing hands with soap and warm water,
- communicants observe social distancing when coming forward to receive Holy Communion
- maintaining maximum physical distance between communicant and priest,
- the priest wears a suitable face covering for the purpose of distribution,
- offering Holy Communion solely in the hand (those who would otherwise receive on the tongue are asked to make spiritual communion).

The above guidelines on distribution of Holy Communion will be further reviewed when guidance is published by the Irish Episcopal Conference on the return to the public celebration of Mass and the sacraments.

Conscious of the huge sacrifice many families have experienced and heroically made since the introduction of restrictions, we continue to hold them and their deceased loved ones in our prayers.

I pray that, in the near future, the time will come when we will be able to honour and pray for all who have died and who have been laid to rest without the full participation of those who have shouldered the pain of grief and loss in such unprecedented circumstances.

This provision has immediate effect.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ Noel Treanor', with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the signature.

+ Noel Treanor  
Bishop of Down and Connor

4<sup>th</sup> June 2020

