



**THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
GUIDELINES FOR RETURN TO PUBLIC WORSHIP**

RCCG REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

JULY 3, 2020

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RCCG Republic of Ireland return to physical church worship guidelines have been prepared to provide a framework to parish pastors in relation to the re-opening of our parishes that have been closed alongside all places of worship nationwide because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These guidelines are complementary to official guidelines released by relevant governmental authorities and are to be viewed in line with government and public health advice as appropriate. Based on the released roadmap of the national government, churches are not under strict obligation to reopen or return after the 29th of June. However, parishes should only reopen if the pastoral and ministerial teams as well as church management (where the parishes have employed staff and volunteers who work on site) feel they can safely do so.

As announced on RTE on 20 June 2020, the roadmap easing off the restrictions stipulated, among others, that “people can attend services at places of worship, with physical distancing measures in place”. It further stressed that, “people can gather in groups of 50 indoors and 100 outdoors until 20 July and thereafter, it increases to 100 indoors and 500 outdoors. Gatherings of more than 5,000 will not take place before 31 August.”

However, the latest government directives received today, 3rd July 2020, clarify the issue of numbers.

The Government Cabinet Committee reviewed the guidance, which stated that an assessment should be carried out for each premises to determine how many can attend within the requirements of social distancing.

The Cabinet Committee decided that where the size of the premises allows for a capacity of greater than 50 this may be permitted only where:

- ✓ Social distancing guidelines are adhered to
- ✓ The premises can be subdivided into distinct sections (cordoned or marked appropriately) of not more than 50 persons in each section
- ✓ There is a minimum of 4m between sections
- ✓ Each section having its own entrance/exit route
- ✓ There are separate arrangements for elements of the service involving close contact, e.g. the distribution of Holy Communion.

- ✓ Strictly no movement of people between sections before, during or after the service.
- ✓ The premises is well-ventilated.

Furthermore, account must also be taken regarding the risk of congregation by people outside before and after any services, having regard to outdoor overall limits on mass gatherings and arrangements for staggered exiting after ceremonies

The use of face coverings is strongly recommended for such indoor settings.

1.0 Information / Notices on COVID-19

- Display of COVID-19 information fliers highlighting the signs and symptoms of the virus at conspicuous places in the parish. Parish pastors are advised to keep themselves abreast and updated on the latest advice from governmental agencies and public health authorities.
- Parishes are encouraged to adhere with public health guidelines with regards to signage while care is taken to ensure that such signage does not constitute bottleneck for people entering or leaving the sanctuary. Removal of all non-essential printed notices, brochures, fliers, bulletins, magazines, etc to ease off human traffic and clutter before, during and after service.
- Each returning Parish Pastor is encouraged to announce some of the measures to be put in place to minimise or prevent the spread of COVID-19 while congregating in the physical church namely: hand sanitising and/ or hand washing, pulmonary or respiratory hygiene, social physical distancing, contact minimising, vulnerable members of congregation, suspected cases of the virus during service times, etc.
- Parishes are encouraged to have a simple, easy to understand safety policy which is to be clearly communicated to the entire church from the altar.
- Parishes may consider making a brief walk-through video informing members about what to expect when they come to church for service.

The video may be posted to all social media pages ahead of each service until they get accustomed to the new normal.

2.0 Church Premises

- Parishes that do not own or have permanent lease to their places of worship should check with their landlords (E.g hotel management, school board or community centre management) about meeting and under what specified criteria.
- **Plan should be put in place for recording attendance**, in addition to statutory head count. Members may be encouraged to bring a note with their name and contact number and drop it in a designated box or open an attendance register to record this information.

This is imperative because if anyone who has been to your parish tests positive for COVID-19, the public health authorities may contact you for the full manifest or list of everyone else who was in that particular service.

3.0 Regular Cleaning

- Health authorities suggest that coronavirus can survive for an upwards of three days on hard surfaces. It is therefore advised that parishes that have full access to and ownership of their premises may consider additional, regular cleaning and disinfecting of the sanctuary to help reduce the spread of the virus.

In cases where members of congregation may want to be involved in preparing the parishes for reopening, such participation should not be discouraged provided physical distancing practice is observed.

- Toilets and restrooms are potential points for the virus to fester. Should you decide to open the toilet facilities, sanctuary keepers should be deployed to wipe the facilities after each use to prevent and minimise the spread.

4.0 Church Service & Ministration

- Risk of transmission of this deadly virus is traceable to duration and proximity of contact. Parishes are encouraged to consider shorter services while exploring the possibility of continuing holding some of their services online.
- It is advised that the number of officiating ministers be limited to two in addition to the pastor with cordless microphones provided for each minister while wipes are also made available to clean their hands and the microphones. Better still, ministers should avoid or minimise touching fixed mic, pulpit, instruments, etc.
- Parishes may also consider reducing the number of officiating choristers at each service while keeping choir ministration short, as singing discharges moist and droplets like sneezing which can remain in the atmosphere indoors.
- Weekly services and other off-site, remote spiritual support should continue to be provided for members of congregation who may not be able to physically attend church, where applicable.
- For collection of tithes and offering, etc, it is advisable to place the collection baskets strategically to minimise the need for people walking far to give their offering, while maintaining the stipulated distancing.
- The Pastor or officiating minister may announce procedure for leaving the sanctuary, hall or room at the end of the service while observing the 2-metre distancing as applicable. It may be good to exit row by row, starting from the closest rows to the exit.

5.0 Face Coverings & Face Masks

- Members of congregation should be given proper advice on the use of face coverings and or face masks to ensure conformity and consistency by all.

- Governmental and public health authorities' advice should be followed with regards to face covering in an enclosed location with other people. However, people with respiratory or pulmonary underlying health issues like, asthma, shortness of breath, etc may not use face covering on the basis of public health advice.

6.0 Hand Sanitisers

- Provision of adequate hand sanitisers at all entrances, exits and other strategic points in the church. Care should be taken to avoid obstructive human traffic for entering and leaving the church auditorium, sanctuary, or hall. Ushers may be deployed to hasten the process.
- Members of congregation may also be advised to come along to church with personal hand sanitisers.

7.0 Thermometers

- Parishes may consider the use of handheld thermometers to check people's temperature at the entrance of the church.

8.0 Social / Physical Distancing

- The 2-metre social or physical distancing should be clearly delineated within and around the church premises.
- Where possible and allowable by the layout of the parish, separate doors should be used for entering and exiting the church building.
- Hugs, handshakes and high fives should be strongly discouraged amongst members of congregation.
- Members of congregation should be advised not to congregate in the car park or at the church entrance. Ushers should be used to ensure that people come in and go out of the church seamlessly.

- Depending on the capacity of the parish and family sizes, members of the same household may sit together. In the event that attendance exceeds the minimum safe capacity, parishes should consider exploring a booking system via Eventbrite, etc.

9.0 Refreshments

- Due to the prevailing COVID-19 situation, parishes are encouraged not to serve after-service refreshments to forestall any risks of infection or transmission of the virus.

10.0 Eventualities

- In the event that someone becomes unwell or suddenly develops or shows signs and symptoms of COVID-19, parish pastors are encouraged to put the following in place:
 - ✓ Appointment of designated person (s) preferably a health personnel to deal with any suspected case (s) of COVID-19.
 - ✓ Procedure for reporting suspected case (s) without raising any alarm.
 - ✓ Designation of an agreed, well ventilated isolation point pending when relevant public health authorities are informed, or the emergency service contacted to evacuate such COVID symptomized person (s).
 - ✓ Accessibility to the isolation point by the concerned individual who might also be person (s) with disabilities.

11.0 Junior Church

The safety of the children is paramount and extra precaution is necessary and appropriate.

We therefore need to establish reopening plans that align with the similar government guidelines for crèches, preschools, and mainstream schools viz:

- Enforcing social distancing for the children will be a bit of a challenge. This can only be done by limiting class sizes.

- Having 3 church services with different age groups attending at allocated times (Saturday church service can be incorporated).
- Another option is to allow families to sit together in service while keeping social distancing regulations
- To adhere to social distancing regulations, younger children can stay in the main auditorium with their parents and the older ones stay in Junior church.
- Another option is to open Junior church only to children of ages 3- 10years and older children will stay in the main auditorium.
- Mandatory training will need to be provided to all volunteers on sanitation guidelines and list of procedures to ensure safety.
- PPE – Personal Protection Equipment – disposable gloves, Aprons and face protection must be provided.
- Personal Protection aprons must be worn by volunteers only when necessary.
- Wellness checks must be implemented as follows:
 - ✓ Volunteers will be required to wear masks when in contact with parents. They are not to be worn in classrooms in order not to scare or discourage the children.
 - ✓ One or two volunteers will be assigned to manage the check-in and out system.
 - ✓ Parents are not allowed in the children's church.
 - ✓ Clean and sanitize all toys frequently.
 - ✓ Clean and sanitize all carpets and rugs in all the children areas.
 - ✓ Having multiple hand sanitizers in the classrooms, toilets, and corridors.
 - ✓ Cleaning must be done frequently.

- ✓ Records of cleaning must be put on the door with date/time on the sheet.
- ✓ Volunteers with symptoms are not allowed to attend services
- Floor stickers must be put in place to ensure social distancing measures are being followed
- Safety signage must be printed and displayed all around the children's church as safety precautions
- Post reminders for hand-washing procedures for parents and children

Conclusion: In order to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus, as a church, we all must adhere to all safety measures recommended by the relevant government agencies and public health authorities. ***All Parish Pastors are encouraged to customise these guidelines according to their local congregation and accommodation.*** Below are useful links to download literature (<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>for Covid-19 awareness:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/stay-safe-protect.pdf>

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/covid-19-prevention-a4-poster.pdf>

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/covid-19-who-is-at-risk-a4-poster.pdf>

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/hand-hygiene-poster-english.pdf>

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/hse-face-covering-guidelines-poster-screen.pdf>



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