COVID-19 – UPDATE

As you are aware the Government has put on hold the further easing of restrictions which were due to come into effect on Monday August 10th, 2020 as part of phase 4 of the Government’s roadmap for the re-opening of society.

There is a worrying increase in the infection rate and the number of people being diagnosed with Covid-19. NPHET has confirmed that a significant increase of diagnosed cases is occurring in group or congregational settings.

This is therefore an opportune time to pause and reflect on how we are doing as a Diocese and within our Parish Community. It is great that increased numbers are now able to attend our Churches for the celebration of Mass, however, we must not be complacent. As we have seen in the counties of Kildare, Offaly and Laois the situation can change very quickly and there is an onus on us all to ensure that the Government guidelines and the advice from NPHET are followed.

Please re-read the Diocesan guidelines for the return of Public Mass and the subsequent updates and review how these are being implemented in your Parish. Review the guidance issued by Government on July 3rd, 2020 for Places of Worship. The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre also issued guidance for religious services on July 8th, 2020. This document can be read online at www.hpsc.ie. Attached is a useful checklist/reminder of various measures to which particular attention should be paid. This checklist is not exhaustive and there is an onus on each Parish to ensure that it has a plan in place for the safe return of public and private worship.

REMEMBER to follow the Government guidelines and the advice from NPHET and to follow the guidance on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette and social distancing. Ensure that the appropriate notices/posters are in place and clearly displayed. Current Government guidelines MUST be complied with. To use the phrase now in common usage “We are all in this together”. We all have a shared responsibility to follow the guidelines and advice and to take such measures as are necessary to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

The Diocesan Covid Support Team

August 10th, 2020

COVID-19 CHECKLIST

1. Every Parish should have in place a Covid-19 plan to facilitate the return of public Mass. There should be a meeting of the Parish Covid Committee at least once a month to review the plan and the guidelines and see how these are working in practice in your Parish. The plan should be updated where required and additional measures introduced as necessary.
2. In Churches where the capacity exceeds 50 people ensure that the Church is subdivided into separate sections and that these sections are marked or cordoned off and are readily identifiable. No more than 50 people are to be allowed in each section and there is to be no movement of people between sections.
3. The rules of social distancing continue to apply such that people must remain at least 2m apart from each other and there must be a minimum of 4m between sections. Cordon off seats between sections to ensure that the 4m requirement is complied with.
4. Request all those attending Mass or visiting a Church to wear a face mask/face covering/visor.
5. Ensure that there are sufficient hand sanitisers in place at all Church entrance and exit doors and that all sanitisers are checked regularly and are topped up. Only use an alcohol - based gel. Do not forget to clean all sanitisers daily. Any spillage of gel should be cleaned up immediately to prevent falls.
6. Where possible (this will vary with the weather) keep entrance and exit doors in an open position to facilitate entry and exit and to minimise the need for people to touch the doors with their hands.
7. Have a team of ushers in place for each Mass to assist people attending Mass, facilitating the distribution of Holy Communion and organizing the exit from the Church on a staggered basis at the end of Mass.
8. Review your practice for the distribution of Holy Communion. Remember the following:-
9. Maintain social distancing.
10. Hand sanitisers should be available at all Communion Stations for use by the Priest/Minister of the Eucharist.
11. The Priest/Minister of the Eucharist must sanitise their hands prior to and after the distribution of Holy Communion and must wear a face mask/face covering/visor.
12. Holy Communion should be distributed into the hands and NOT the tongue. The Communion Host should be placed in the hands of the recipient in such a way as to avoid hand contact
13. Where possible and where the configuration of the Church allows, put in place a one-way system for the distribution of Holy Communion.
14. Remember at the end of Mass the exit from the Church must be carried out on a staggered basis so as to ensure there is no loss of social distancing. This can be done on a section by section basis. Remind the members of the congregation that they are not to gather immediately outside the Church door.
15. Remember to clean the Church after every gathering with a disinfectant or household detergent. All hard surfaces that are frequently touched must be cleaned regularly.
16. Remember that collection boxes are NOT to be passed amongst members of the congregation. Provide collection boxes at the Church entry and exit doors for the collection of envelopes/offerings/donations. Remind people that the collection boxes replace the normal offertory collection. Encourage people to consider making their weekly offering/donation by standing order or using the online facility.

BAPTISMS, WEDDINGS & FUNERALS

Numbers attending baptisms, weddings and funerals shall be in accordance with the capacity set for each Church, observing the rules of social distancing and following the guidelines which now apply for religious services. Outside of religious services indoor gatherings are permissible of up to 50 people in line with public health advice.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The HSE guidelines provide that the use of confined spaces or confessional boxes should be suspended and spaces closed off. Alternative arrangements must be compliant with social distancing requirements. Consider the provision of a confessional area within the main body of the Church which allows for social distancing and provide for a waiting area which will respect the confidentiality of those attending the Sacrament. Consider the use of a Perspex/plexiglass screen, designed to allow communication.

August 10th, 2020

Diocese of Kerry