



Nottingham Roman Catholic
Diocesan Education Service

**Celebration of Mass in Schools
during the covid-19 pandemic**

October 2020



‘The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.’

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 1324)

Recognising the centrality of the Mass within our Catholic communities, be they parishes, schools, or other chaplaincies or communities, it was with a heavy heart that the Bishops of England and Wales had to suspend the public celebration of Mass in March this year. Since July it has been possible for numbers of the faithful to come to Mass and celebrate the Eucharist together, always mindful of the need to exercise caution and prudence when coming together during this covid-19 pandemic.

Alongside the re-welcoming of parishioners to their churches for Mass, it is also important that the young people in our schools are invited to come back to Mass, to be present with Jesus in the celebration, and to receive Him in Holy Communion.

I am mindful of the great efforts our school teachers, staff, and lay chaplains have made to ensure that our schools are places of safety, and that every covid-19 risk is mitigated as far as possible. Much hard work has gone into ensuring that the myriad guidelines issued by the Government and others are adhered to, whilst at the same time helping to ensure that our young people have as ‘normal’ an experience of school as possible.

Having previously asked that Mass not be celebrated in schools, to allow the new academic year to begin without the added challenges of preparing for Masses to be celebrated, I now judge that the time is right, should Trusts, schools, and their local priests consider it prudent, to once again allow Mass to be celebrated by our school communities. **I therefore permit the celebration of Mass in the Catholic schools of our diocese with effect from the memorial of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, 1st October 2020.** Of course this must be done in accordance with all the guidelines presently operating in schools, and in no way should our celebration of Mass become something which is a burden to the school community. An encounter with Jesus is always a joy and a moment of spiritual beauty.

It is my hope, therefore, that this booklet of guidelines and diocesan requirements for the safe celebration of Mass in our schools, based on the ways in which Mass is being safely celebrated in churches throughout England and Wales, will be a help and not another burden for school staff. A sample risk assessment has been produced for Trusts and schools to adapt to their particular needs, for which I thank both the Nottingham Diocesan Property Department and the Diocesan Education Service. I am further grateful to the Nottingham Diocesan Catholic Youth Service for their help in producing a short video explaining the changes pupils and students will see when they come together for a School Mass, and which can be found on the NDCYS website.

May we again come to recognise Jesus in the Mass and in the Eucharist, and in so doing, may our encounter with Jesus lead us to become the Missionary Disciples he is calling us to be.

With my prayers and thanks to you all,

+ Patrick McKinney

Bishop of Nottingham

Preparations for Mass

1. Although almost all of the pupils and students in our Catholic schools are familiar with the celebration of Mass, the experience of attending Mass in the covid-19 pandemic is different and this needs to be recognised, and explained to pupils and students before they come to Mass for the first time. Some pupils and students, and members of staff, might have attended Mass in their parishes since July, but it's likely that many will not have had this opportunity, and a little explanation beforehand will help them to see that, whilst some of the externals have changed, the heart of the Mass, the encounter with Jesus, is still the same.
2. Please take a little time to talk to those who will be attending Mass, and use the NDCYS video too. If you have any questions, please check with your Trust Lead Lay Chaplain, with the Diocesan Education Service, or with the Episcopal Vicar for Catholic Education. Please also make sure that you have spoken with the priest who will be celebrating the Mass to ensure that he is fully aware of what will be the same, and what will be different for him in the celebration of the Mass.
3. Overall the school's Risk Assessment must be followed in each part, and the guidelines and sample Risk Assessment given here are solely for the elements of the celebration of Mass which are different from the usual routine in school. Please make sure that the Risk Assessment given here is adapted, where needed, to the requirements of your school, by whichever member of school staff will be responsible (eg the headteacher, lay chaplain, head of RE, RE co-ordinator). The completed Risk Assessment should then be approved by your Trust Board in the usual way.
4. It is anticipated that Mass will be celebrated only for individual classes / bubbles, to avoid any cross-contamination between different bubbles within school. Likewise parents and other guests shouldn't be invited to attend the Mass, but only those staff who would usually be with that bubble of pupils or students, with (if appropriate) the lay chaplain in attendance, and socially distanced.
5. Likewise it is anticipated that if Mass is celebrated in the local church, rather than in a chapel, hall, or other space in the school, these guidelines will be followed. It would not be appropriate for a school bubble to attend Mass with parishioners present, whether in school or in the local church, since this gives rise to the potential for cross-contamination. Likewise care should be taken in a church setting that the parish's usual cleaning protocols, etc, are followed.
6. Where there might be a need for more than one Mass to be celebrated in a given school on a single day (such as when Opening of the Year Masses are being celebrated for two separate bubbles of new pupils or students), a second Mass may be celebrated, observing especially the directives given below at point 31. However it is not permitted for more than two Masses to be celebrated in the same school and on the same day.
7. Services of the Word and Holy Communion should not be celebrated in school at this time.

Setting Up for Mass

8. School staff should set up the altar / table for the altar (if there isn't a permanent altar in school) together with any other furniture (presidential chair, lectern, etc). These should then be disinfected.
9. The chapel or hall should be set up so that the priest, at all times, is socially distanced from the school community present.

10. Ideally the priest alone should prepare all of the items needed for Mass, so that only he handles the sacred vessels, etc. If this isn't possible a single lay chaplain, member of staff, etc, should do so. If this is the case disposable gloves and mask should be worn throughout the setting up. Before handling the altar breads disposable gloves should be put on, and the gloved hands should then be sanitised, after which the altar breads can be handled.
11. Enough single altar breads should be placed into a clean, lidded ciborium for those who will be at the Mass. If there is no ciborium with a lid, use a pall (stiff square of linen) to cover. This cover will not be removed until the time for distribution. If the school doesn't have a lidded ciborium, or a pall, speak to the parish priest and arrange to borrow one.
12. Should there be need for low-gluten altar breads to be consecrated during the Mass, these should be prepared in the same manner as in point 11 above, but before the other altar breads (to avoid any contamination of the gluten in the altar breads passing to the low-gluten altar breads) and placed in an individual lidded or covered ciborium or closed pyx, separate to the other altar breads.
13. A single, larger, altar bread should be placed on a separate paten / ciborium for the priest. This should be placed on the chalice with a purificator and a pall over the top.
14. Enough wine for the priest alone should be poured into a jug / cruet, and this along with a cruet of water should be covered. A small lavabo bowl and towel should accompany them.
15. All these items for Mass should be placed on a credence table, or on the side of the altar. There will be no procession of gifts during the Mass.
16. The lectionary for Mass should be marked for the Gospel, and placed on the lectern, by the priest, or by another person wearing gloved and then sanitised hands. Ideally those reading the readings and leading the intercessions, etc, should use single-use sheets, and could proclaim the readings from their places, so that only the priest goes to the lectern (to avoid any risk of cross-contamination). Another option would be for those proclaiming the readings to use the ambo (if they are in the same bubble there is no need to sanitise the ambo between use) and the priest to proclaim the Gospel from the chair or the altar.
17. Altar Servers won't be used during the Mass because of the need to maintain a social distance from the priest. However if a pupil or student usually acts as an altar server he or she could ring the bell at the appropriate times of the Eucharistic Prayer, if the bell can be made available to the individual after having been disinfected, and then disinfected again after the Mass.
18. If a hand-held microphone is being used this should be sanitised before Mass, and can be passed between pupils / students in the same bubble. If a microphone is needed for the priest this should be separate to the one used by the pupils / students.
19. Hand sanitiser should be available for the priest to use during Mass, either on the credence table or on the altar; likewise a face mask or visor should be brought by the priest, or a fresh one available for his use.
20. The priest should bring all his own vestments with him for the Mass, unless there are vestments available in school which would not be worn by any other clergy, and which can be stored in a location to which others wouldn't have access. If the school vestments are stored in a shared space (such as the staff room) the priest should either not use these vestments (and bring his own with him), or take the worn vestments home after the Mass and wash them before they are returned to the school.

21. The school's usual procedures for coming into the school chapel / hall etc should be followed, especially with respect to sanitising hands on entry and exit.

The Celebration of Mass

22. The priest celebrating the Mass should do so in accordance with the Diocesan Guidelines for the celebration of Mass, together with the Diocesan Directory for the Celebration of Masses with Young People (Planning and Celebrating the Mass with Young People). At all times the priest should be comfortable with the changes that have been made, as must the school staff. It is important to have a thorough conversation between the priest-celebrant and the responsible staff member(s) before the Mass is celebrated.
23. It is desirable that, as far as possible, the Mass is celebrated as would usually be the case in school, following the guidelines mentioned in point 22 above, and with those present taking a full part. Pupils / students, so far as can be done safely, should still be encouraged to prepare and lead the various appropriate parts of the Mass, with due consideration for the need to curtail this if it poses problems with movement, availability of microphones, etc.
24. Usually the priest should celebrate Mass with no concelebrating priests or assisting deacons, unless there is a particular need for this in an individual context, which has been agreed in advance with the school staff.
25. During the Mass there will be some changes:
 - a. Masks should be worn in accordance with the school's policy for wearing masks and face-coverings. The priest, who should be socially distanced from the school community (see point 9, above), does not need to wear a face covering during the Mass, until the distribution of Holy Communion.
 - b. There will be no entrance or recessional processions;
 - c. There will be no congregational singing;
 - d. Responses will be made with quiet voices;
 - e. There will be no altar servers (although one altar server could be given the bell beforehand, to ring at the appropriate times from his or her place);
 - f. There will be no physical Sign of Peace;
 - g. Holy Communion will be distributed in silence, as detailed below.
26. Since congregational singing is not permitted, use can be made of pre-recorded music, and likewise if the school has the facility to show the words of the Mass on a screen via powerpoint or similar this could take the place of booklets, etc, which shouldn't be used.
27. Any music used should be religious in character, eg pre-recorded hymns, or appropriate for a religious occasion, such as classical music. If the music used has lyrics as well as instrumental elements care should be taken that the lyrics are either those of a hymn, or at least in keeping with Catholic teaching. Secular music should be avoided.

28. Those attending Mass can either sit throughout the Mass, or stand, sit and kneel at the usual times, or some combination of these (eg perhaps standing at the start, sitting from the readings until the Our Father, standing until having received Holy Communion, and then sitting for the remainder of the Mass). An exact choreography for the Mass should be determined by the priest and the relevant school staff, having regard to the location in which the Mass is being celebrated, whether chairs are being used or not, the numbers attending, the Church's rubrics, the importance of maintaining social distances, and the need to avoid disruption during the Mass. An indication of when to stand, sit, etc, could be given on the powerpoint etc (if used), or by a lay chaplain or another member of staff.
29. At the time for the Sign of Peace it is permissible for a sign-language Sign of Peace to be used instead. This should be with the agreement of the priest and the lay chaplain or relevant member of staff, and should not contravene any Risk Assessments concerning movement, etc, and only where those attending the Mass are knowledgeable and comfortable with making this sign.
30. For the reception of Holy Communion the following rubric should be followed:
 - a. At the end of the Lamb of God, the priest prays the usual prayer 'Behold, the Lamb of God' with its usual response 'Lord I am not worthy'.
 - b. The priest then elevates and shows the Sacred Host to the congregation, saying 'The Body of Christ', to which all respond 'Amen'.
 - c. The priest alone then consumes the Sacred Host.
 - d. The priest then elevates and shows the chalice to the congregation, saying 'The Blood of Christ', to which all respond 'Amen'.
 - e. The priest alone then consumes the Precious Blood from the chalice.
 - f. The priest then takes up and wears a face mask, sanitises his hands, genuflects to the Blessed Sacrament in the covered ciborium, removes the cover or pall, and goes to the usual place to distribute Holy Communion, with the Hosts only.
 - g. Since the numbers actually present for the Mass will be limited, and to avoid any congestion of movement with those coming forward and returning to their places, and given that Holy Communion is distributed only under the species of the Sacred Host, no use should be made of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and the priest should distribute Holy Communion alone.
 - h. The first person comes forward to receive Holy Communion. He or she stops before the priest, maintaining a social distance (it might be helpful to put a temporary barrier in place, such as a chair, to help with the distancing), removes his or her face mask (if worn) ideally by unhooking one loop, so it is still hanging from the other loop; it might be easier to take it off and place it in the person's pocket; and with arms 'at full stretch' receives Holy Communion (the Host) on the hand, and in silence. After consuming the Blessed Sacrament the person replaces his or her face mask (if worn), and the moves back to his or her place, following the directions of the school staff.
 - i. The second person then comes forward in a similar fashion, following the directions of the school staff, and receives Holy Communion likewise.

37. The table used for the altar (if there isn't a permanent altar) and any other furniture used, should be disinfected by school staff (as for other school furniture) and not used again until an appropriate period has elapsed, following the school's usual furniture cleaning protocols.
38. Ordinarily there should not be more than one Mass celebrated in a school in a single day. However, for a particular reason (eg two Masses of Welcome for two different bubbles), should a subsequent Mass be celebrated immediately / shortly after the first, and in the same chapel / hall, the following should be observed:
 - a. If the same priest is celebrating both the Masses he can wear the same vestments and use the same altar linens.
 - b. If a second priest is celebrating the second Mass he should wear different vestments (the first having been removed in accordance with point 27 above) and use fresh altar linens etc (the first having been removed in accordance with point 29 above).
 - c. If the priest alone has handled the vessels (ie setting up for the Mass and during the Mass) they may be used again by the priest without the need to be disinfected between the two Masses (ie the priest can set up for the second Mass having simply purified the vessels after the first Mass).
 - d. If the second Mass is being celebrated by a different priest, or if a lay chaplain or member of staff, etc, has handled the vessels, the vessels should be thoroughly disinfected between the two Masses before they are used again by the second priest. Ideally a new set of sacred vessels should be used for the second Mass, and prepared by the second priest himself (in accordance with point 3 above), avoiding the need for another person (eg a lay chaplain) to touch the vessels. If the school doesn't have a second set of vessels the second priest should be asked to bring whatever is needed himself.
 - e. The chapel / hall should be sanitised between the departure of the first bubble and associated staff, and the arrival of the second bubble and associated staff, in accordance with the school's cleaning protocol.
 - f. Should the second Mass be celebrated in a different location within the school (eg in a second classroom) all should be prepared in that place in accordance with numbers 8 – 21 above, and with reference to 38 a – d, above.