

Re-opening of our Churches

The Latest Guidance from the Diocese

The Diocese of Leeds Steering Group has provided the following information points to keep you up to date on the arrangements being made.

- An updated Guidance document has been issued to Dioceses by the Bishops' Conference and a Risk Assessment Template for the re-opening of churches for individual prayer is being prepared in collaboration with the Government's Task Force.
- To date, there is no clear timetable for when the Government might give permission for the re-opening of churches in advance of the 4th July date given in Phase 3 of its COVID-19 recovery strategy document (published on 11th May). Until a specific permission is given, no church can be re-opened to the public.
 - * ***In this Diocese, the re-opening of any individual church will only take place following the risk assessment being signed-off by the Dean and the Property Administrator in consultation with the Parish Priest and when all safety measures and stewarding arrangements are in place.***
- The frequency and timing of the opening of the church will depend entirely on local resources and can be modified as appropriate.
 - * Churches should not be open during the celebration of Mass, or any liturgy, including the Divine Office and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament (these all are defined as Public Worship which is not yet able to recommence under the Government's current restrictions)
- So far, the following factors are clear:
 - * Before permission is given to re-open, one of the requirements will be to have ***two stewards on duty throughout the period of time*** a church is open. The Guidance is that stewards "should not be drawn from those instructed to shield themselves, nor, as a general rule, from groups considered more vulnerable to coronavirus."
 - To implement this, the duties of stewards will be clearly set out. Volunteers will be asked to declare that they know what they are required to do as stewards and to confirm that they are safely and clinically able to do so. Current Government policy is that there are those who

are two levels of significant risk: high and moderate. People at high risk will have received a letter from the NHS. People at moderate risk “can go out to work (if you cannot work from home) and for things like getting food or exercising. But you should try to stay at home as much as possible. It’s very important you follow the general advice on social distancing, including staying at least 2m away from anyone you do not live with.”

- Where anyone under 18 years of age volunteers as a steward, they will be able to do so only when accompanied by an adult member of their household.

- * Permission to open will require an agreed seating and circulation plan which respects the 2metre social distancing. Where possible a signposted one-way system with separate entrance and exit routes should also be used, where sanitizer hand gel is provided on entry and exit.

- In this Diocese the Dean, or a priest designated by the Bishop, or an officer from the curial staff will arrange to visit the church to agree the plan with the Parish Priest. A questionnaire/check list will be signed-off and submitted to the Property Office to agree.

- * Permission to re-open will require appropriate cleaning arrangements to be in place while churches are in use and a record kept.