

## 1. Covid Restrictions Update

Following a meeting of the Places of Worship Task Force yesterday, I can confirm that communal worship will be able to restart from 2 December in all Local Restriction Tiers. The officials from the MHCLG noted that the past month has been an intensely challenging time for all of our communities and they hope that this will be welcome news. Attached is a table produced by the MHCLG Faith team with further information for you. Effectively this is a return to the covid-secure protocols that existed in our churches at 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020. A useful link with printable posters representing what can/cannot be done in each tier is found here:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tier-posters-medium-high-and-very-high?utm\\_source=3a55a4b5-d043-48b5-86bf-ffa64e5ce602&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tier-posters-medium-high-and-very-high?utm_source=3a55a4b5-d043-48b5-86bf-ffa64e5ce602&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

The decision of the Government to permit communal worship in all tiers under the covid-secure protocols that have been developed and approved for our churches is in recognition of the importance of people who have the right to attend communal worship and also of our active collaboration with the MHCLG and PHE in creating the safe environments in our buildings, which must continue. Therefore it would be important to emphasise that there should be no easing off on the applications of this good practice and encouragement for people to fully engage with what is asked of them.

### **Communal Singing**

There has been further research into communal/congregational singing and I attach a paper from PHE regarding this. It notes that singing outdoors creates a lower risk than indoors and that any indoor singing should be mitigated against with good ventilation and the wearing of masks. There has been no direction to allow congregational singing from PHE yet, they are still doing research (especially on classification of buildings/population density within buildings) however the research completed so far indicates that well-controlled singing (music groups and choirs) is permitted providing there is still social distancing and mitigations (screens etc).

### **Christmas Period**

There was clear direction from the officials that there will be a brief time-limited easement for families to join together over the Christmas period. More information regarding this is due on Thursday of this week. Over this period, children will not be in school and fewer people will be in work and so there is increased transmission risk due this increased personal interaction. The Government will state that hospitality businesses will have to “call” orders at 10pm and close by 11pm each night during this period. With regard to Midnight Masses, it was strongly encouraged that a local risk assessment be completed for each church in its physical locality to look at Mass/Service times. Booking systems were

encouraged to limit numbers and if it were expedient to move “Midnight Mass” to an earlier time, this should be considered for this year.

### **Government Consultation on Faith Engagement**

There was a strong ask from the officials of the MHCLG for individual Catholics to respond to this open consultation on the way Government engages with faith communities. The link to the online submission is:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/independent-faith-engagement-review-call-for-evidence>

This call for evidence aims to collect views to underpin the Faith Engagement Review. This call for evidence opened on 13<sup>th</sup> November and will run for a period of 4 weeks closing at 11:45pm on 11 December 2020.

Please ask your clergy, religious and lay faithful to engage in this important consultation.

The Catholic Union with Catholic Voices are organising a webinar on “how the government should engage with faith groups” on Wednesday 2 December at 7pm. Colin Bloom, the Faith Engagement Adviser at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, will present and promote the government consultation on the issue. Link and registration: <https://www.catholicvoices.org.uk/events/independent-faith-review>