

## Statement from Bishop Mark: Friday 21<sup>nd</sup> May 2020

### PREPARING TO EMERGE FROM LOCKDOWN

As we await an announcement regarding the reopening of churches for private prayer, we have been asked by the Bishop's Conference to begin considering who in each of our parishes might be nominated to serve as a "COVID-19 Safety Lead" to help assist with the implementation of safety policies as our churches re-open. I would be grateful if you begin giving thought as to who might be able to undertake this task at parish level. I would also be grateful if you could begin to give some consideration to those parishioners who might be approached and subsequently trained in public health requirements to serve as stewards facilitating this long-anticipated reopening. It will be important to be conscious that parishioners who fall into a risk category could not be invited to volunteer for these roles. The risk categories include those aged 70+, pregnant women, and anyone with underlying health conditions.

As part of this process, risk assessments will need to be drawn up and appropriate PPE purchased along with cleaning materials. The Diocesan Health and Safety Officer, Julie Tinsley, will return to work next week to begin drawing up guidance and advice which will be issued in due course. At diocesan level, we have been able to secure some limited supplies of PPE (face masks, gloves, disposable aprons and hand sanitiser along with barrier tape and floor marking tape) which we will be seeking to increase in the coming weeks working with churchmarketplace. However, this will be a good time to consider ways of securing more readily available supplies of domestic cleaning materials such as household disinfectant; disposable cloths, disposable or kitchen "rubber" gloves and disposable aprons. Hand sanitiser will also be needed which should be at least 65% alcohol in order to be effective.

I hope when a governmental decision is made and we have received the full advice on public safety measures in co-ordination with Public Health England we will be given sufficient time to undertake the immediate preparation and training for the re-opening our churches. I am conscious that with the public announcement there will be expectation of finding churches open for prayer wherever this is possible, even if this is only for a limited time each day. This expectation will no doubt extend beyond the Catholic community. I am conscious that parish clergy who are self-isolating at this time will not be able to be directly involved in the process of re-opening so consideration will need to be given as to how this process can best and most safely be undertaken in each locality. It will be especially important for us to manage the reopening with both care and responsibility for all who may visit our churches and also as a first stage in the return to Mass and access to the sacraments which we are now seeing in other countries across Europe. The demands of managing stewarding, maintaining social distancing and undertaking cleaning procedures when we receive further guidance and instructions will no doubt be burdensome, yet they will help allow us gradually return to greater normalcy in the life of the Church after these unprecedented weeks of closure and lockdown.