

Weekly Message from Fr William for the Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Covid measures for in-church celebration of mass

Dear People of St Mary's. In the first 18 months of the pandemic I went for stricter measures in our parish than legally required, including several months of voluntary church closure, doing our bit to help protect the economy and the NHS, both vulnerable at that time. There were long periods when businesses were required by law to shut their doors in order to minimise viral transmission. The economy took a hit, and personal livelihoods were lost, especially those that relied on open doors and footfall. We were able to celebrate mass from home, and we did, in large numbers, to minimise viral transmission and help the wider society.

Now the situation is different. The NHS is safe and the economy too, until the next wave or until the next pandemic. All national covid regulations were lifted last Thursday, to be replaced by a culture of personal responsibility. I believe that this time we should do the same.

Face coverings: I'll no longer be making recommendations on the wearing of face coverings, though individuals may of course choose to do so, and there remain good reasons to do so. Leaving a space between families: This will also now be up to personal choice and personal responsibility.

Some measures I put in place during the pandemic will be continued as good health and hygiene practice irrespective of covid, and could be considered part of our going forward culture: ventilation, and the use of hand sanitiser coming into church. I'll try and make sure this continues to be available.

There are two liturgical actions that I'm not re-introducing just yet until I've had time to further consider and consult. The sign of peace will be omitted. If this is understood by all then nobody will be offended that a sign of peace is not reciprocated. And there are almost certainly people in the congregation who do not feel ready for this, or who consider that this is not yet advisable. A clear cut omission of this liturgical action for now will ensure that everybody is considered. The second liturgical action I'm not re-introducing just now is sharing of the chalice.

Covid measures have sometimes polarised our society, and not just in this country. I'm aware of a wide spectrum of views within our own parish. Vince and I have consulted closely on covid measures throughout the pandemic, to keep the parish safe, and to keep in view our wider responsibilities as a parish. We have been very much of a mind throughout. I'm very grateful to him for his role in this as our Health and Safety Officer, for the tremendous amount he has done for the parish throughout the pandemic behind the scenes, and to the whole parish for your understanding and resilience. Thank you.



Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time, 27th Feb 2022