

**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF THE BRITISH ISLES
AND IRELAND**

PARISHIONER VISITS FOR PRIVATE PRAYER - INSTRUCTIONS

For Clergy and Senior Church Officers ...

Preamble

The government has announced that places of worship can open for private individual prayer (NOT SERVICES OR GROUP PRAYER) as from 13th June 2020.

These instructions fit within the framework of the Archdiocesan Risk Assessment Template for Private Prayer. As such, they incorporate [Government Instructions \(12th June 2020\)](#).

This document will be revised from time to time, as regulations and best practices evolve.

Conditions

The government has made it clear that the easing of the lockdown will last as long as the R (Reproduction Rate) Number of the virus stays below 1.

A rate of 1 and above means that the virus is not being controlled with sufficient safety. Therefore, in accordance with the government's own policy, we should only be opening up our churches for private prayer while the R Number remains at 0.9 or lower for at least two weeks; 0.9 because there is always a margin of error and two weeks because the published information is always two weeks old.

You should keep under continual review the R Number locally because this, together with other statistical information, will be used by the authorities to determine when *local* lockdowns may need to be reimposed.

This template is for local completion (WITHOUT AMENDMENT) and is to be issued to those who wish to come to church for private prayer as individuals or as a household group by prior appointment.

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Each parish needs to survey its building to determine how many individuals and/or household groups can be present at any one time and still maintain social distancing of 2 metres from any other individual or household group. Household groups will of course need more space to be allocated to them.

[Heading:] COMING TO CHURCH FOR PRIVATE PRAYER

Name of Parish: [N]

PLEASE DO NOT MAKE ARRANGEMENTS TO COME TO CHURCH UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES IF YOU HAVE COVID LIKE SYMPTOMS OR, OF COURSE, IF YOU ARE STILL IN QUARANTINE OR SELF ISOLATING, EVEN WITHOUT SYMPTOMS!

Instructions

1. Visits will be by appointment made no later than [day and time] before the visiting day, **[day and time]**.
2. In the visiting period there will be **[number]** appointment times when you will be able to enter church to pray either as an individual or as a household group for no more than **[number]** minutes. "Household group" means strictly only those living in the same house, not your wider family living elsewhere.
3. If you are late for your appointment slot, this will not be extended. Please remember that other people may be waiting. If you are more than **[number]** minutes late, you will miss your appointment completely.
4. Upon arrival at church, please wait outside the church and if there is a queue, at least 2 metres apart. The priest/steward will invite you in when your time comes.
5. You must be wearing either a mask or a suitable face covering while you are waiting to come into church and at all times in church. Bring a few spare masks with you. See 7 (ix).

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6. Upon entering church, sanitise your hands with the gel provided and enter the main body of the church when invited to do so.

7. DON'TS!

- (i) DO NOT approach anyone in the church apart from members of your own household group within 2 metres, and that includes the priest, so do not attempt to kiss his hand. He will bless you, if asked, without that taking place.
- (ii) DO NOT kiss icons, relics or any other holy object.
- (iii) DO NOT handle the candle box or its contents.
- (iv) DO NOT touch books in the bookstall, the library or service books. If you need prayer books, please bring your own.
- (v) DO NOT let any children present play with toys/books that you may find in church. Please keep your children by your side at all times.
- (vi) DO NOT touch any item of church furniture including door handles. The priest/steward will open and close doors for you.
- (vii) DO NOT discard anything in church bins or leave anything behind you in church.
- (viii) DO NOT touch your face at any time. Although you will have sanitised your hands before entering the main body of the church, and notwithstanding our best efforts to keep church clean, we cannot guarantee that, after opening church, all surfaces will be virus free.
- (ix) DO NOT shed any virus you may have (unknowingly of course). For example, if you absolutely have to cough (or even sneeze) you must use your own tissues and, afterwards, remove any contaminated mask and seal this with the tissues in a bag (brought by yourself) and take it home with you. Finally re-sanitise your hands without touching anything (you will need help of course to operate the sanitiser) and then fit a new mask.

8. Any church toilets will be locked. They are not to be used while you are in church. Please bear this in mind if you are bringing children to church.

9. Lighting a candle before prayer:

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- (i) The priest/steward will ask you how many candles you would like.
- (ii) He (not you) will place them in the sand tray.
- (iii) When he moves aside, you can pick them up and light them from the light provided.
- (iv) Before leaving, extinguish the candle(s) and take them home with you. DO NOT discard them in church.
- (v) Offerings for candles may be *dropped* in the basket provided, [NOT placed in the usual candle tray slot].

DELETE WORDS IN BRACKETS IF YOU USE BASKETS ANYWAY.

10. Prayer – to accommodate as many people as possible in the appointment schedule, unfortunately you can only have **[number]** minutes maximum in church. You will probably want to pray quietly or silently. Please do not sing out loud as this can spread virus laden aerosols in confined spaces. Singing softly to yourself is fine.
11. These visits are also available to you for the collection (by prior request) of holy oil, holy water and books (as appropriate). Any books, if possible, should be pre-ordered and payment made by online banking, cheque or cash ... in that order of preference please (as with donations to the church at this time). Any church libraries will remain closed.
12. For any other books you would like to buy from the bookstall, not pre-ordered, please tell the priest/steward and he will get these for you. Do not touch any books on the bookstall, even to examine before purchase. The priest/steward will gladly show and tell you what the book is about.
13. Please do not bring food or other gifts into church. The kitchen is not to be used at this time.
14. When the priest/steward asks you to leave, please do so promptly after collecting your used candles and sanitising your hands on your way out.
15. Your exit point is not your entry point! This is to avoid any unnecessary congestion and cross traffic at the main entrance. **[DELETE THESE FIRST TWO SENTENCES IF YOU ONLY HAVE ONE ENTRANCE/EXIT].**

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Signage for entry, exit and places to occupy in church (standing or sitting) will be plainly visible on church premises. Signage for safety precautions will also be prominently displayed. Please observe these instructions to the letter.

Thank you for your cooperation!

You need to comply strictly with these rules to keep yourself and everyone else safe. We will be continually monitoring the situation during opening hours to make sure that this is the case. If there were to be any breach of these protocols, this would lead to a deep clean of the church with trained operatives with Personal Protective Equipment. This would be both expensive (since our own cleaners could not do this) and it would be unsafe for them to do this anyway. It would also interrupt the use of the building and this is quite aside from the risk to public health.

Sad though this may be, and for the foreseeable future, the church must be, as far as possible, a sterile environment. Thank you for your cooperation. By observing these safety protocols, you are helping to keep us all as safe as possible when in church for private prayer.

[Signed] [Parish Priest]

[Signed] [Churchwarden or Trustee]

[Signed] [Churchwarden or Trustee]

[Date of Issue]