

Guidance for Adult Baptism, Reception into the Church and Adult Confirmation

Introduction

The Government has announced that from 4th July 2020, communal acts of worship will be allowed in our Catholic Churches. This guidance, issued by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for the Celebration of Adult Baptism and Reception into the Church, assumes that the general guidance published by the Conference, based on Government Guidance on the safe opening of Places of Worship for individual prayer, is in place.¹ In particular, the maximum safe operating capacity of the church, based on social distancing guidelines, should be clearly signposted at the door and the number and position within the church of people attending at any one time should be overseen by volunteer stewards. The Guidance offered by the Bishops' Conference for the Celebration of Mass should also be observed as these rites take place within the context of Holy Mass.

Social Distancing - IMPORTANT

The Government maintains that the 2m social distancing requirements should be applied where possible. The Government has said it is possible to go to "1m plus;" this means you can space people more closely (with a minimum of 1m) providing a mitigation of risk is also applied. In the case of our churches, this would mean the compulsory wearing of a face covering for members of the congregation. If those on the sanctuary are sufficiently distant from the congregation, there is no need to wear face coverings.

Worshippers should limit their interactions with anyone they are not attending church with, i.e. if they are attending corporate worship with one other household, wherever possible they should maintain social distancing with anyone outside of this group.

Priests should remain mindful of their own personal situation with respect to potential exposure to virus transmission. It is permissible for those in the 70+ age group, and those who are vulnerable to infection, to celebrate Mass, but it is strongly advised that they do not distribute Holy Communion and take particular care to be constantly socially distant from the congregation. They should return to the sacristy directly after Mass is ended.

Face Coverings

Face coverings are currently mandatory on public transport and will be mandatory in shops and in supermarkets from 24th July 2020. People are also strongly encouraged to wear face coverings in enclosed public spaces where there are people they do not normally meet, such as a church.

Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

As these celebrations take place, by necessity, outside of the usual time, that is the Paschal Vigil or Eastertide, care should be taken so that they have a markedly paschal character. The General Instruction for Christian Initiation notes that the Ritual Mass "Christian Initiation: Baptism" from the Roman Missal is used, and the readings are chosen from those given in the Lectionary for the Mass "Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation apart from the Easter Vigil." It is recommended that these rites are celebrated within the context of the parish Sunday Mass; if not then the number of

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic>

people attending should be capped at 30, as it constitutes a “Life-Cycle event” as defined by the Government Guidance for the use of Places of Worship.

Before the Mass

Everything required for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation and of the Mass should be prepared with care. The person preparing the sacred vessels and other items for the celebration of the rites should wash their hands for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser, or wear gloves, before touching anything to be used during the Rite.

The priest should prepare as many cotton buds infused with the Oil of Catechumens as needed for one per candidate. Those to be baptised should bring their own white garment, and the celebrant should leave their baptismal candle easily accessible for them to pick up. They should bring their own towel with them as well to dry their heads after the water of Baptism has been poured over them.

Celebration of Adult Baptism

A minimum number of servers should assist with these rites. Care should be taken to ensure that there is good social distancing throughout the celebration.

The Mass continues as normal, applying the Guidance for the Celebration of Mass for the Liturgy of the Word, until after the Homily.

The Presentation of the Candidates

The priest moves to the baptismal font and calls those to be baptised. According to the geography around the font, the candidates should move, with their godparent, to a place around the font, but being aware of social distancing. It may be more practical at this time for them to remain in their places in the congregation.

The Litany of the Saints and the Prayer over the Water

The Litany should be said, or sung by a single cantor, socially distanced and with additional mitigations. The people should not respond verbally if sung, but prayerfully in their hearts. The font should be pre-filled with water and covered before these rites begin. The priest prays the prayer over the water extending his hand over the font but not touching the water.

The Renunciation of Sin

The priest directs the questions to the candidates, and they answer together whilst standing in their places.

Anointing with the Oil of Catechumens

The priest should approach each candidate with a separate pre-prepared cotton bud infused with the Oil of Catechumens. He should anoint the hands of the candidates with the bud at arm’s length to ensure a clear distance between himself and the candidate and then withdraw to a social distance. The candidates should rub the Oil of Catechumens into their hands.

The Profession of Faith

The priest directs the interrogative form of the Apostles’ Creed to the candidates, and they answer together whilst standing in their places.

The Baptism

The candidates approach the font, one by one, with their godparent carrying the candidate’s towel. They should place their head over the font so that the water in the font can be poured over their foreheads. The priest, using a shell or jug, should pour the water over the candidate’s head whilst

reciting the sacramental form. Care should be taken to avoid excess splashing of the water. The godparent should wipe the head of the newly baptised with their own towel.

The Clothing with the White Garment

The godparent places the white garment on the shoulders of the newly baptised whilst the priest recites the prescribed formula.

The Presentation of a Lighted Candle

The godparent should light the baptismal candle from the Paschal Candle whilst the priest says the associated formula and give it to the newly baptised.

Reception of Christians into Full Communion with the Church

The Invitation

Those to be received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church should be called by name by the priest. They should either enter the Sanctuary and join the newly baptised or remain in their places. Their Sponsor joins them at this point. The priest then says the words of Invitation.

The Profession of Faith

The candidates then make the Profession of Faith using the formula in the Ritual. It is advised that each candidate should have their own printed copy of this which they should take with them when they leave.

The Act of Reception

After the Profession of Faith, the candidates with their sponsors, one by one, approach the priest who receives them into the Church saying the prescribed formula. There should be no physical contact at this point, but a gesture of welcome should be made.

Celebration of Confirmation

The place of Confirmation should be around the baptismal font or in the sanctuary of the church. It is advised that this should take place wherever the celebration of baptism has taken place to minimise the movement of people around the church.

The Invitation

The priest says the Invitation to Confirmation to those who have just been baptised. He then asks the congregation to pray for them silently.

The Laying On of Hands

The priest should extend his hands towards the newly baptised without touching them and pray the associated prayer.

The Anointing with Sacred Chrism

The candidates for Confirmation should wipe their foreheads with a tissue before the Sacrament is conferred. This tissue should be retained by them until it can be disposed of (eg. place in a pocket). The priest sanitises his hands picks up the oil stock with the Sacred Chrism. He dips his thumb into the Sacred Chrism and anoints the newly baptised on the forehead saying the sacramental form.

After each anointing, he must clean his hands carefully and dry them before applying the sanitising gel. He must remove the Sacred Chrism carefully from his thumb (eg. with lemon juice and a tissue) as Sacred Chrism can form a barrier to the neutralising action of sanitising gel. Once this has been done, he can then approach the next candidate and repeat the process as necessary.

The priest should offer the peace of Christ to the newly confirmed without physical contact.

The Mass then continues, and the Guidance for the Celebration of Mass should be applied. Those who are newly Confirmed may participate in the Prayer of the Faithful, but they should sanitise their hands before and avoid touching the book or the microphone.

Although it is desirable that the newly Confirmed receive Holy Communion under both kinds, at this time it is recommended that they receive only under one kind, in the hand. The newly Confirmed should receive Holy Communion first, and then a sacred silence should be held before Holy Communion is distributed to the congregation so they may pray for the neophytes.

After the Celebration of the Mass

Baptisms and Receptions are celebration of joy for those being initiated, their families and the whole Church. Any photographs of the event should be taken with care to ensure social distancing between households and those in social bubbles. All should be done so that this does not detract from the happiness of the occasion.

The priest should place the used altar linens into a receptacle for laundry. All sacred vessels should be washed in hot water with a little neutral soap and dried completely before storing. The cotton buds used for the catechumenal anointing and the tissues used for cleaning the priest's thumb should be burned. Any discarded printed materials should be removed and bagged for disposal.

The church should be closed after the Mass has finished in order to clean the space according to the Bishops' Conference guidelines on individual prayer. If there is cause for concern regarding the possible contamination of clerical vestments worn during the celebration of these rites, these should be washed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, using the warmest water setting allowed for the fabric and allowing time for them to dry completely.

Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas
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