



Archdiocese of Southwark

Pastoral Letter

Concerning the Reopening of Catholic Churches for Individual Prayer

*'Give the Lord glory and power, give the Lord the glory of His name.
Adore the Lord in His holy court.'*(Ps 29)

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed our world, our country, and, in different ways, each of our lives. For some this has been devastating, with loss of life and serious illness. Throughout these past months we have prayed for everyone who has died, and for their families and loved ones. We are continuing to pray for all our keyworkers who serve with such selfless generosity. And we pray for our local, national, and global community, as we rebuild our future together. Perhaps we are learning not to take so much for granted and to focus more on who and what matters most. Please God, moving forward, we will treat each other with greater kindness, with greater respect, and with greater love.

As we know, places of worship, including Catholic churches, were closed by the Government to control the spread of the Coronavirus infection and save lives. As the restrictions have begun to be relaxed, we are very grateful that permission has now been given for places of worship to reopen for individual prayer from Monday 15 June. This can only happen, however, if all the necessary hygiene and social distancing measures have been put in place. We welcome this first step towards the restoration, in due course, of public liturgical celebrations with a congregation.

The Government's permission to open our churches for visits for individual prayer enables us to draw closer to Christ who is really and truly present in the Blessed Sacrament. Our sacramental yearning, for the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation, now finds deeper anticipation as, once again, we are able to pray in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord. It is a beautiful providence that our churches are allowed to open the day after *Corpus Christi*, the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. There is a longstanding Catholic tradition of visits to the Blessed Sacrament and prayers before the Tabernacle. We are now invited to revive these with new devotion.

For any church to open from 15 June, strict requirements must be put in place which have been communicated to every parish in the Archdiocese. To be allowed to open their church, each parish will need to satisfy all the necessary conditions outlined.

This means that not every church will open immediately, and some churches may remain closed for the time being. The days and times which churches can open will also vary. I know that many people have been frustrated that our churches have been closed. Together, patiently, we can now begin opening them, wherever possible, and as soon as possible. We share the same desire to unlock the doors to the Lord's house. This must, however, be managed properly and safely.

During this time of pandemic, I am immensely grateful for the remarkable ways in which parishes, schools, individuals, and families are sustaining the life of faith. I want to express a special word of thanks to the priests in the Archdiocese who have continued to celebrate Holy Mass each day in closed churches, without congregations, some of them live-streaming the liturgy, catechesis, prayers and devotions. We all look forward to being able to gather again in our churches, especially for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. Until this is possible, as best we can, we will open our churches for individual prayer.

As we enter our churches, to *'adore the Lord in his holy court,'* we carry with us, in our prayer and in our hearts, the needs of everyone in the communities where we live, that peace, justice, and healing will touch our lives and our world.

With the assurance of my prayers and every blessing
Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by the initials 'JW' and a flourish, with a horizontal line underneath.

The Most Reverend John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark

Given at Archbishop's House, Southwark, 11 June 2020,
the Memoria of St Barnabas the Apostle