

CHURCH RE-OPENING FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

Dear Parishioners of the Parishes of Holy Rosary and St. Bernadettes,

I am sure many will welcome the decision of the Northern Ireland Executive on June 25th, that Churches may reopen for Public Worship and the celebration of the Eucharist from 29th June 2020. Further detail on the celebration of Weddings, Baptisms and Funerals will be released, by the Executive, week beginning 29th June.

At the time of writing this note we are awaiting some further guidance from the Diocese regarding the Re-opening of Churches. The Priests of the 8 parishes in the South and East Belfast Pastoral Community, have met (via Zoom) and will meet again on Monday 29th June. It was agreed that we will **announce the starting dates for the reopening of the Churches in our Pastoral Community together**. The Pastoral Council in both parishes have met (via Zoom) and will meet again this coming week.

In order to comply with the necessary protocols for the safety of parishioners, ministers, and priests we require a large number of volunteers to assist with welcoming and stewarding parishioners coming to the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments. The Churches are required to be cleaned after each Mass and this too will require a greater number of volunteers to assist. I take this opportunity to offer sincere thanks, on behalf of us all, to those who have already volunteered to welcome, clean and steward in our Churches, since they were-opened for private prayer. I thank in particular Roisin Smylie (Holy Rosary) and Gillian McKeever (St. Bernadettes) for co-ordinating the teams of volunteers.

If anyone is willing to help please email: holyrosary@downandconnor.org or stbernadettes@downandconnor.org.

These continue to be challenging times for everyone and, as you are very aware, we must do our best both collectively and individually to ensure the safety and health of one another both inside and outside of the Churches. This is a responsibility for each individual, but government guidance says that those who are **over 70** or who have **underlying health problems** - including those who have been asked to shield - are at a significantly higher risk of COVID-19.

The number of parishioners able to celebrate Mass and in keeping with the guidelines, will depend upon the mix of individuals and family groups. We will have limited capacity.

Remember that the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays/Holy Days has been dispensed with during the COVID pandemic. Mass will continue to be streamed via the webcam in St. Bernadettes Church.

It is challenging for all of us, as we come out of lockdown so our next steps will need to be careful, cautious, and gradual. More detailed information will be given next weekend via the Parish websites and via the Masses, via webcam.

I again express my gratitude to all, in both Parishes, for the way you continue to adapt and to serve the needs of parishioners and the wider community. I thank you for your understanding, patience, and support

In the meantime, I hope you all keep well and safe and let us remember one another before the Lord in prayer.

With every good wish and blessing,

Fr. Brendan Hickland