



St Mary's Parish, Haddington Road

Special Christmas Contact Newsletter 2020

“Look! The virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Emmanuel.” (Mt. 1:23)

Parish Pastoral Council and Christmas Mass Arrangements

Following the recent government announcements relating to the change in the Covid Restrictive Measures back to Level 3+, and specifically the arrangements relating to the reopening of places of worship, the PPC met on Tuesday December 8. At that meeting, we developed a plan of action for St Mary's that will allow us to hold our Christmas celebrations in safety and to accommodate as many parishioners as possible within the limits that the situation has placed upon us.

The PPC wish to state very clearly that St Mary's, like every other parish of the Archdiocese, will be adhering rigorously to the official HSE COVID-19 Guidance for Religious Services. There is no alternative to this and it is what parishioners would expect. In coming to these decisions, we are above all mindful of the safety and well-being of everybody attending Masses. It is important to emphasise that the changes from the usual arrangements for Christmas liturgy, while they might appear strange and regrettable, are not arbitrary. Our hope and expectation is that this will be for one year only. Up to now, people in our parish have been very supportive and understanding, and there is a definite feeling that *we will get through this together*.

In setting out the arrangements for Mass attendance and in asking you to think about the situation, it is very important that we all show flexibility as the parish tries to do as much as we can within our given constraints. While it is understandable that everybody wants to get to Mass for Christmas, it is also true that this, unfortunately, will not be possible in our current situation. Our normal total Christmas attendance at all Masses is over 800-900 people. This year, over the number of Masses we can practically provide, we will be restricted to **400** attendees, or less than half our usual numbers on Dec 24th and 25th. In conditions such as those we are dealing with we consequently have to think a bit differently.

Numbers and attendance at Mass: The absolute maximum number that can be admitted to our church for any Mass is **100 people**, in two “pods” of 50 (see below) and there are very stringent guidelines for this. However, to accommodate as many people as possible during the Christmas Octave, up to New Year's Day, there will be **TWO MASSES each day at 10.00 & 12.40**, as well as the usual Vigil and Feastday Masses on Dec 24 and 25th and Sunday Masses on Dec 26/27th (see following times of scheduled Masses). In the circumstances, everybody should know that they will have met their **obligations** if they either follow one of the Christmas Masses on our website TV or attend any Mass on any day during the octave of Christmas.

Tickets : Given the above conditions, admission to Mass on the four days over Christmas itself (Dec 24- 27) must be regulated and necessarily restricted in accordance with HSE Guidelines. Admission will be done by a system of advance ticketing. Tickets will be made available on a first-come, first-served basis, from **Monday 14 December** by booking through Parish Office (Tel: 01-660 0075 or parishoffice@stmaryshaddingtonroad.ie). There will be a maximum of **five tickets per household**. Please do not seek to attend the church on those Christmas days, Dec 24-27, without a ticket, since it will not be possible to admit you. Also, please do not make a booking unless you fully intend to come as you may be depriving another person of a place. Please be flexible if your first choice is not available

The PPC ask and trust that parishioners will co-operate with the ushers on duty, and support their efforts with understanding and in a spirit of solidarity and community during this special season of peace and goodwill. At all other Masses over the holiday season the standard HSE Guidelines, notably the wearing of masks, will apply but without ticketing.

Information required for ticketing: Name, phone number, email address (if available). For Mass schedule,

please see the enclosed Christmas Programme. You will get your Tickets by email or by collecting printed tickets at the Parish Office.

Recommended Safety Measures

- There will be **minor changes in scheduling** of Masses, notably the morning Masses on Christmas Day, to allow one hour for airing of the building and sanitisation measures between each Mass. (See Mass Programme enclosed)
- Please use **sanitisers** available on entering *and* on leaving the church
- Please wear a **mask** at all times, unless and except when you are giving a reading.
- The church will be divided into two **PODS**, each with 50 people; one will be at the front of the Church and the second in the rear of the church, the two separated by the passageway between the side door and the door to the corridor on the left-hand side.
- **Entering the church:** Those with tickets to **Pod A (at the front of the church)** should enter strictly through the side doors **and** those in **Pod B** should enter only through the door at the back of the church. Ushers will point out the available seats in each pod. We are asked to ensure that there be no mixing between the two pods. Please bring and show your ticket to the Usher at the door
- **Communion:** The priest will be assisted by the deacon or a Eucharistic minister, one at the altar (for Pod A communicants only) and the other half way down the church (for Pod B only). It is essential that we approach through the main aisle and return by the side aisles, keeping the appropriate distance.
- **Leaving the church:** People in **Pod A** will leave the church only by either of the side doors, the one going through the side corridor and the one leading into the church yard, while it is only people from **Pod B** who will leave through the two main rear doors,
- Please **leave the church immediately** and in an orderly fashion, respecting distancing, once the final hymn has concluded. We are asked to make our way promptly out of the church yard. There should be **no congregating on the grounds**.
- Please **refrain from singing**, even the well-known carols and hymns, as this creates an increased risk and is not allowed for in the HSE guidelines. Our organist and cantor will take care of the music
- **Sacrament of reconciliation/confession.** The use of confessional boxes is suspended, and the spaces are closed off. Any alternative arrangements must be compliant with social distancing requirements.

Christmas Dues

An envelope for Christmas dues has been enclosed with this pack. This week, the PPC also reviewed the parish financial situation and was updated on the situation in the Archdiocese. We have received generous support from many parishioners but the reality is that we are functioning with only 30% of our usual income. The situation in the Archdiocese is now close to critical. This makes the Christmas Dues even more important this year. These Dues are what keeps the diocese going, including the salaries of our priests. These salaries were reduced by 25% in June; another reduction seems inevitable at this stage, without increased income. The PPC, aware of the very difficult situation that exists for many people, asks parishioners to be as generous as possible as it is increasingly a question of survival.

Christmas Dues payments can be made by cheque or through the DONATE button on our website.