



BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

Rt. Rev. Philip A. Egan BA, STL, PhD

Bishop's House
Bishop Crispian Way
Portsmouth
Hampshire PO1 3HG

Tel. 023 9282 0894
bishop@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

1st November 2020

The Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

I write to you as the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth. Our Diocese extends from Oxford to Bournemouth and Southampton, the Isle of Wight and the Channel Isles, with 230,000 Catholics, 91 parishes and 70 schools.

First of all, I wish to express profound gratitude to you for your tireless service as our Prime Minister and for all that you do to serve the common good of our land. I thank you also for the leadership you have shewn during this time of great crisis with the many difficult decisions you have had to take in order to deal with the pandemic and protect the vulnerable.

I am delighted – and grateful to you – that the lock-down measures proposed from Thursday 5th November will allow our churches to remain open for private prayer. Human beings not only have bodily needs but spiritual needs too and these needs are intimately connected with their mental, psychological and emotional well-being. If grocery shops remain open, why not churches?

Moreover, for Catholics, churches are not simply “places of worship” where the community gathers. Churches have a deeply religious significance. They symbolise the Person of Jesus Christ, who comes to feed, to teach and to shepherd His flock. In a church, Christ imparts His Word and His Sacraments in order to renew people and to send them out on mission and service of others.

In July, our churches were allowed to reopen for Sacred Worship and since then many of the faithful across our Diocese have returned to Mass. They write to me to express their great joy at this. Of course, the capacity of our churches has been reduced to make them COVID-safe. The rigorous safety regimes in place require careful social distancing, the wearing of face-masks, sanitisation, one-way systems and the deep cleansing of the building. All of this has made attending Mass one of the safest of all activities that people can undertake. This is borne out by the statistics. There is no evidence that attending the Liturgy in our churches has contributed to the recent rises in coronavirus cases.

I am writing because I earnestly want to ask you to amend the proposed guidance to come in on 5th November, so as to enable our churches to remain open – with all the usual safety regimes - for the Sacred Liturgy.

In addition, I am writing to all the 34 MPs - 31 of whom are Conservatives - in our Diocese to ask them to support this request, when the issue comes before Parliament on Wednesday.

Throughout the crisis, we Catholics have been praying to God for a speedy end to the pandemic, for the safety and protection of all, for the health of the sick and those who care for them, for anyone suffering financially, for patients in hospitals and the residents of care-homes, for all medical staff and key workers, for government leaders, scientists and advisors, for the discovery of an effective, ethically-sourced, vaccine, for patience, perseverance and mental well-being and for all who have died and those who mourn them. To this end, I have called a diocese-wide special Day of Prayer and Fasting for an End to the Coronavirus Pandemic. The Day is called "Twenty-Four Hours with the Lord" and will take place on Friday 27th November 2020. This is the last Friday before the Church begins its new Liturgical Year on the First Sunday of Advent (29th November).

Please be assured that on that Day of Prayer, we will be praying for you, for your well-being and for your family.

With my prayers and best wishes

+Philip

Bishop of Portsmouth