

Living in FAITH

in the age of COVID-19



Learning to live with Covid-19

Among the many difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been the particular challenge of sustaining a normal faith life involving worship in Church. When we chose to close all church buildings on 19th March 2020, no one could predict when they would re-open and how the 'new normal' would look. With our churches now re-opened, we still face significant restrictions on our worship. While undesirable, these are necessary if we are to minimise the risks of gathering in confined spaces.

In order to learn from this unique pandemic experience, and to identify how any subsequent challenges might be met, the Bishops' Conference of Scotland invited parishes to participate in a *Pastoral Ministry Survey* by the end of July 2020. The results of the survey indicate that, while it has clearly been difficult to sustain a 'normal' parish life, parish clergy and laypeople have worked hard to serve the needs of parish communities, as far as they were able to, given all the restrictions.

While the survey shows that COVID-19 has presented many challenges, it also suggests that parish communities have responded to these challenges with creativity, determination and love to find solutions for the good of all.

This newsletter reports on this experience and provides information and advice which may be of benefit to parishes across Scotland. It also points to sources of support which might assist the Catholic community to deal with some of the effects of the pandemic and to continue living in Faith as we deal with any future issues arising from the crisis.



“ The Bishops are well aware of the challenges which COVID-19 has presented for clergy and for parish communities.

We greatly appreciate all that has been done to assist people to remain involved with their parishes and with the Church. I know that the Spirit is breathing new life. May God bless you and keep you safe.

+ **Brian McGee**

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published in August 2020 by the
Bishops' Conference of Scotland
General Secretariat

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What did we **LEARN** in our parishes?

before, during and after lockdown



How did we manage to **KEEP IN TOUCH?**

The survey showed that the greatest challenge facing clergy during lockdown was the lack of face-to-face contact with parishioners as everyone remained socially isolated and at home. Home visits were not permitted and are still significantly restricted. Some clergy were themselves shielding and unable to leave their houses. These difficulties had practical consequences as well as an emotional impact.

CHALLENGES

- Lack of face-to-face contact with parishioners
- Not seeing people at Mass mid-week and on Sundays
- Being unable to visit the sick and housebound
- Parish contact details were sometimes missing
- Some parishioners did not have access to the Internet or lacked the skills to use social media

Some parish Pastoral committees and SVDP groups organised phone calls to keep in touch with isolated parishioners. Some parishioners took responsibility to pass on information from parish newsletters to neighbours without internet access.

Some parishes managed to distribute newsletters by email and on the parish website or Facebook. Some parishes struggled with a lack of up-to-date contact details for parishioners - phone numbers, email addresses etc.

A few parishes recorded video and audio messages and made them available on CD / DVD.

Some Parish groups managed to meet 'virtually' using Zoom, Whats App or other software and were able to discuss, plan and support each other.

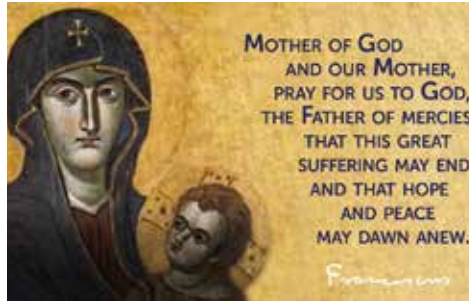
Many parishes, who were forced to make use of social media such as Facebook, report that they now see the need to develop their online profile. This will involve the commitment of a significant amount of time and expertise.

It is clear that the biggest obstacle in sustaining good communications is the lack of internet access for some parishioners and their lack of familiarity with social media.

How were **spiritual needs** met?

How was the spiritual life of parish communities sustained during lockdown?

The pattern of spiritual life in our parish communities was gravely disrupted when our church buildings were closed. While Mass was still celebrated daily in each church, this was a private celebration. Other services, such as the Rosary or the Divine Office, could no longer be offered as public occasions.



During lockdown, all parish clergy made efforts to keep in touch with their parish communities in various ways. Some priests chose use of technology to livestream the celebration of Mass.

Sometimes with the advice of parishioners, but often using their own initiative, priests used phones, tablets, laptops and cameras to record and /or broadcast Mass from churches and from presbyteries. While a few parishes already had such livestreaming facilities already installed, most were learning new skills and experimenting with technology.

The response of many parishioners to being able to keep in touch with their own parish - or with the Church more widely - was very positive.

Many people have expressed their appreciation of all the efforts made to support and nourish them spiritually, particularly at a time of great anxiety caused by the pandemic. There was appreciation of the efforts made to broadcast Holy Week liturgies that enabled so many to participate in the Sacred Paschal Triduum.

Some parishes were creative in their use of technology, for instance by offering online Children's Liturgy services and/or resources that could be used to support the faith development of children.

During Lent, the Stations of the Cross were broadcast, live or recorded. In May, efforts were made across some parishes and dioceses to pray the Rosary online. Other parishes took the opportunity to recommend the use of particular online resources to support prayer and devotions in family homes.

While it is clear that 'virtual' participation in Mass is very much second-best, nonetheless it has enabled many in the Catholic community to remain connected to the Church's liturgical life when the alternative would have meant a complete absence of contact with the sacramental life of the Church. It also appears to have led to a wider participation by many who have tuned in to services locally, nationally and internationally.

While no one can predict the potential impact of such participation, it may point to an area of potential growth.

RESPONSES

- using technology for catechesis and evangelisation
- forming teams of parishioners who could offer their expertise in using IT & video
- updating Parish registers to include email
- encouraging use of standing orders for parish giving
- encouraging parish groups to meet virtually
- using Eventbrite to manage Mass bookings

Pope Francis:

“ I invite you to tackle together the pressing questions that the pandemic has brought to the fore, social ills above all. And we will do it in the light of the Gospel, of the theological virtues and of the principles of the Church's social doctrine.

Impact on **MENTAL HEALTH**

How well do we understand the effect of our experience of the pandemic on our mental and emotional health?



People suffering from mental ill-health often feel isolated from their faith community and thus isolated from God.

The consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic have been significant for the physical health of countries throughout the world, as evidenced by the number of deaths and serious illnesses caused by COVID-19. In every community, families have lost loved ones, sometimes in the most tragic and harrowing circumstances.

Less obvious – and harder to quantify – has been the adverse impact on mental and emotional health of our experience of the pandemic which is still ongoing. For everyone, it has been difficult to live with restrictions and the anxieties; for some it may have been traumatic. A Scottish Government review estimated an 8% increase in mental health problems as a result of COVID-19.

The loss of jobs and income from businesses, together with underemployment and insecure work, have placed enormous pressure on people trying to provide for themselves and their families. Isolation has also been very difficult for many – and dangerous for those who are in situations of family strife and domestic violence.

Any individual with a pre-existing history of poor mental health or addictions will have found that lockdown has exacerbated their symptoms and/or triggers. This applies particularly to victim-survivors of non-recent abuse. The experience of lockdown will have been very similar to memories of feeling locked into the abuse, of being removed from sources of help, of being silenced and abandoned.



As people of faith, we can show understanding and offer support to those who are suffering from symptoms of mental ill-health. They are in our families, our schools, our workplaces, our parish communities, our care homes and they can be of any age or socio-economic background.

During this time of pandemic, we have often heard it said that “we are all in this together”. The quality of our care for the most vulnerable or disadvantaged will be the test of whether or not this is true. A commitment to the common good means attending to the good of all of us, without exception. It means paying special attention to those who are most often overlooked, marginalised or excluded.

Our parishes, organisations and communities can be places of acceptance, care and healing, not places of rejection or judgement. Furthermore, as Pope Francis constantly reminds us, we have to take the initiative to go out to those pushed to the edges, rather than waiting for them to come to us seeking welcome.

All human beings have frailties and limitations because we are imperfect creatures. Despite and even through these frailties and limitations, all of us are able to give glory to God and to share in Jesus’ mission.

Factors affecting mental health

Being aware of these COVID-19 factors may help you to support those whose mental wellbeing has suffered.



FEAR OF COVID

Fear of Covid infection for oneself and loved ones is a source of anxiety. People may be anxious much of the time or have episodes of anxiety. Those who have been isolating may be anxious about going out and about. The real risk of a second and subsequent wave of infection can cause hopelessness.

COVID INFECTION

Treatment in hospital for Covid may leave some people with traumatic memories and symptoms of post-traumatic stress (PTS), including irritability, sudden distressing intrusive memories and avoidance of stimuli associated with upsetting experiences. Post viral illnesses which affect mental health.

LOCKDOWN ANXIETY

More time has been spent in family units often in cramped conditions. It is more difficult to separate pressures of work from pressures of home life. Home schooling has been a challenge for many parents and for children and young people. Pre-existing relationship difficulties are likely to be exacerbated.

ISOLATION

Social isolation causes an increase in loneliness. Separation from family members from those in care homes may increase disorientation and confusion in the elderly.

HEALTH SUPPORT

There have been delays to planned assessments, treatments and operations. Many projects which promote health through social activities have only been able to provide telephone support.

FINANCIAL WORRIES

Unemployment, job insecurity and uncertainty about finances undermine mental health.

GRIEVING

Normal funeral arrangements have been interrupted with limited ability to spend time with dying relatives, restricted funeral arrangements and restrictions on travel for grieving families.

ADDICTIONS

There is evidence that lockdown increased the risk of addictive behaviour, whether online or through alcohol and substance misuse.

DOMESTIC ABUSE

The number of calls to telephone helplines about domestic abuse has increased significantly during the pandemic. An increase in the online abuse of children and young people has also been reported.

Caring for mental ill-health

sources of information, advice and support for those whose mental health is being affected by COVID-19.

Websites

Clear Your Head	https://clearyourhead.scot
Provides advice about keeping physically active, keeping to a routine, keeping in touch with others and managing anxieties and moods. It offers signposts to other sources of help and advice including links with all the leading mental health third sector organisations.	
NHS Inform	https://www.nhsinform.scot
Provides reliable up-to-date health information on Covid-19 in Scotland and more detailed self-care mental health advice. Topics include stress, anxiety, depression, trauma, money worries, alcohol and drug problems. Information is also available in a variety of languages.	
Breathing Space	https://breathingspace.scot/
Breathing Space is a telephone therapy service provided by NHS Scotland. Individuals can self-refer for talking treatment for low mood anxiety and stress.	
Thriving Plus	https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/
Provides resources for helping families to look after their own mental health, including videos, activities for children, advice for parents/carers and Government guidance	
Together In Mind	https://togetherinmind.nhs.uk
Provides good online resources to support mental health and wellbeing, asking such questions as: "How are you today?" "Having trouble switching off?" "Feeling stressed?" "Feeling anxious?"	
NSPCC	https://www.nspcc.org.uk
Provides a offers a range of support and information for parents and carers on issues such as: talking to children worried about coronavirus, coping with tantrums, online safety.	
Alzheimer Scotland	https://www.alzscot.org
Provides information and resources for people with dementia, their carers and families. This includes activities, support for families and what to do if you have to go into hospital during the pandemic.	
Stop It Now	https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/
Provides a confidential helpline and anonymous messaging service for anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse, whether they're worried about their own thoughts, feelings and behaviour, or about another adult or young person.	

Telephone Helplines

Samaritans	116 123	NSPCC Childline	0800 1111
Children 1st Parentline	0800 028 2233	Stop It Now Scotland	0131 556 3535
Domestic Abuse (Scotland)	0800 027 1234	Alcoholics Anonymous	0800 9177 650
Victim Support Helpline	0800 160 1985	Narcotics Anonymous	0300 999 1212
Scottish Women's Aid	0132 226 6606	Gamblers Anonymous	0370 050 8881
Rape Crisis Helpline	08088 010302	Alzheimer Scotland	0808 808 3000
Abused men in Scotland	0808 800 0024		

Supporting prayer and devotion

The websites listed below provide some excellent resources, usually linked to the liturgical year.



Livestream Masses: *Search online for livestreamed Mass from your local parish or cathedral or a parish nearby home.*

Universalis

www.universalis.com

The Liturgy of the Hours (also known as the Divine Office) provides prayers, psalms and meditation to sanctify the hours of every day and all human activity. Although clergy and religious make a particular commitment to pray the Divine Office, it is a prayer for the whole People of God. The Liturgy of the Hours includes the Office of Readings, Morning Prayer, Prayer during the Day, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer. (Access to some content may require a payment.)

Alone Together

www.alonetogether.org.uk

Alone Together was created in response to the coronavirus pandemic and now exists as an archive resource for those who face periods of isolation in their lives. For others, it may be a useful reflection of a challenging time where much was learned. It is a library of short videos with guidance on how to break up the day and creative reflections from people with lived experience of isolation and distancing.

Pray As You Go

www.pray-as-you-go.org

This daily prayer session is designed to go with you, to help you pray whenever you find time, but particularly whilst travelling to and from work, study, etc. A new prayer session is produced every day of the working week and one session for the weekend. It is not a 'Thought for the Day', a sermon or a bible-study, but rather a framework for your own prayer. Lasting between ten and thirteen minutes, it combines music, scripture and some questions for reflection. Look out for the 'Pray as you Stay' podcasts which address issues of isolation and distancing from a prayerful perspective.

The Emmaus Initiative

www.lifeteen.com/newroad

The Emmaus Initiative from Life Teen Catholic Youth Ministry adapts the resources to accommodate youth ministry in the "new normal". Training videos for adult youth ministers and resources for young people to deepen their faith are available. (There is a cost associated with these resources.)

GEMS

www.janetschaeffler.com/Best-Practices.html

Great Endeavours Mined and Shared (GEMS) is a vast compendium of resources for faith formation in general including articles, catechetical and prayer resources, how-to guides, videos, humour and more. Recent editions focus on resources for Covid times helping to keep people connected in faith.

Vatican News

www.vaticannews.va/en

This website in English provides news from Rome and from the Church throughout the world. It includes prayer resources and the Pope's daily Mass from the chapel in the Casa Santa Marta.

Children's Liturgy

<https://archedinburgh.org/pastoral-governance/catechetics/>
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=gMpS4smCUrg>

Many Children's Liturgy resources are normally used within a Church setting, some are suitable for use in homes while access to Mass is limited. The **Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh**, through their Office for Catechetics, provides a weekly resource. In the **Diocese of Dunkeld**, Emily Pearson, a teacher and mother provides a Children's Liturgy session which can be viewed on YouTube.

Meditation App

<https://hallow.com/>

This App provides Catholic prayers and reflections that support private prayer and meditation

Getting ready for the next phase

how might we need to adapt our practices to the new COVID-19 context in the months ahead?



While we might be keen to return soon to the usual pattern of life and work in our parishes, it is likely that we may require to retain more 'distanced' forms of contact for some time yet. The advice provided here will help parishes to make use of IT and social media to keep in touch with parishioners. Parishes are advised to assess their preparedness for the event of another period of lockdown, either local or national.

Setting up a parish Facebook page

While not everyone is "on" Facebook, it offers one way to help parishioners stay in touch with the parish. Before you set up a Facebook page, think about what you would use it for. To provide information? To get people talking and sharing? Maybe helping them feel a little less isolated and closer to the church when they can't attend? To spread the Word? Choose what you want to use it for and base your content on this.

All you need is a Facebook account and a computer or a phone to run it. Just make sure you don't let it fall out of use or don't check the page very often. You have to encourage people to follow it and "like" the posts or no one will know it exists.

To set up:

1. Log in to the account. Click on Create in the top bar then choose Page.
2. Click the Get Started button for Community or Public Figure. Type in the name of your church and start typing Religious Organisation, as your Category.
3. Upload a profile picture and a cover picture (landscape), something that is recognisably the church, inside or outside Only use good quality photography or the pictures will look pixelated.



4. Use the name of your church for the username. Click on 'Create Page Username' beneath the profile picture.
5. Then publish a post!
6. Start to think of posts that will get people chatting, liking, sharing.
7. Fill in the About from the left-hand navigation with a description of your church and your church's history. Keep it brief but informative.
8. Start to invite your friends who will be interested.
9. Add other Admins / Editors by going to Settings – Page Roles. Keep Display Names switched off.
10. Add a Contact Us button on the homepage.
11. Regularly add content and advertise your page on your newsletter and website.

To embed Facebook posts into your website:

1. Click on the three dots at the top right-hand side of the post
2. Choose Embed
3. Copy the code and paste it into your website

Newsletters

To avoid any health risks in distributing printed materials, you can email your usual Parish newsletter or create an E-newsletter.



Points to consider:

1. There are many free email providers, such as: <https://www.ymlp.com> or [mailchimp.com](https://www.mailchimp.com) which let you create an E-newsletter for emailing.
2. Make sure you follow General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) when collecting email addresses.
3. Set up a form on your website so people can join the list.
4. Keep the fonts and design clear and simple so your newsletter is easy to read on any device or email provider.
5. Follow the steps and create a basic e-newsletter using the text from your weekly bulletin.

SAFETY FIRST when using technology

Care should be taken when using technology to livestream Mass or to host meetings of parish groups to ensure the online safety and the data protection of all involved. Advice should be sought from Dioceses and/or the Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service on such matters as:

- data privacy notices when services are broadcast from church
- security settings for website, social media accounts and video conference meetings
- parental consent for children and young people being involved.