



Lisbreen
73 Somerton Road,
Belfast, BT15 4DE
N.Ireland
Tel: 0044 (0)28 9077 6185
Fax: 0044 (0)28 9077 9377
Email: nt@downandconnor.org

15 February 2022

Very Reverend and dear Father, Dear Deacon, Dear members of Parish Covid Groups

Relaxation of Covid-19 related regulations and restrictions

I am sure you join with me in welcoming signs that we are moving in a positive direction in our experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. While recognising that the pandemic is not over and that we will have to continue to live with adaptations to our lives for many months, signs, such as the Health Minister's recent announcement regarding Covid-19 regulations, do give us hope.

Since June 2020, when we began to reopen our churches after the first period of 'lockdown', parish communities, clergy and lay faithful, have come together to assess and implement significant changes to the way we gathered as a Christian community. Mitigations have been in place that have had a huge impact on our capacity to celebrate our faith.

The changes to the public health guidance and the consequent changes to the Diocesan advice that accompanies this letter recognise that we will continue to live with the risks and effects of Covid-19 for some time. A gradual and cautious approach, carefully considered and tailored to the needs of each parish community is recommended. Parish priests should consult with parish Covid Groups and Pastoral Councils and develop their own graduated approach. I suggest that the beginning of Lent provides us with a helpful focus for this.

I recognise that many in our community remain vulnerable and anxious. We continue to have a responsibility to take care, to provide appropriate protections and reassurance to all who come together for prayer and worship, in fellowship and parish activities.

I wish once more to gratefully acknowledge the hard work and dedication of so many women and men, clergy and lay people who have engaged in supporting their parishes over the past two years. I think particularly of that 'army' of volunteer ushers, church cleaners, contact takers and Covid group members who have given so generously of their time. I trust this spirit of generous service to the community will continue and find new expressions after these particular needs have ceased.

Please be assured that the Diocesan Office staff will continue to monitor public health advice and that we will review the current guidance in the weeks before the Easter celebration. They remain available should you require additional support, advice or clarification.

Yours sincerely in Christ

+ Noel Treanor
Bishop of Down and Connor