

**Webcam Broadcast C-19 13**

**Hello Everyone! I hope you are safe and well.**

**It's Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020.**

**These last months have seen our whole civilisation worldwide thrust into the unknown. And as we prepare to return to what we hope will be some kind of normality, we know deep down that things cannot possibly revert to being just as they were before.**

**And as we prepare for the reopening of our churches, we also know that we are not returning to the former and familiar church culture. Awkward arrangements and tedious restrictions will remain with us for the foreseeable future.**

**The Church in Ireland at this time is weak. But we need to remember that God does his best work when we are too weak to get in the way. What's before us now can be seen as a unique opportunity to rediscover ourselves as Church, as what Jesus dreamed of. It is a time of new beginnings.**

**In this context, the Parish Team met recently to consider the reopening of our 2 churches. We last met before lockdown, the day after schools closed on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March. We met in our new Pastoral Room at St Kevin's, which has just now been completed, where Natalie, our Parish Catechist, has her office. The space allows our number to keep the 2 metre physical distance.**

**The Government *Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business* allows for the reopening of churches from the end of this month. In our consideration of this matter we are being guided by the Document from the Bishops of the West of Ireland recently published called *Guidance for a Return to the Public Pastoral Life of the Church*. We're using it because it's the first available. We are also being guided by the Government Document *Return to Work Safety Protocol*.**

**You can access these documents on the Parish Website.**

**Given the fact that the Covid-19 Virus will remain present at some level in the community for the foreseeable future, the reopening of churches is not a simple matter.**

**Some people may be of the opinion that reopening our churches is just a matter of reopening the doors and continuing on from where we left off 3 months ago. However the reality is much different. We can't go back to where we were. Whether we like it or not we now have a new companion called Covid-19, and we have to implement ways that will make it safe for people to be in church in this new situation.**

**In combating the danger our new companion poses to all of us, hand hygiene and physical distancing are identified as our paramount strategy. We now have to discover how to implement this strategy in all aspects of church and parish life. We literally have to learn to live in a new way.**

**On a personal level, I feel somewhat nervous about the whole thing. So far, thank God, I have avoided contracting Covid-19. But as the number of people I meet increases, I am nervous of catching the disease. The advice from the HSE is that we, especially those of us who are in the older cohort of the population, should limit the number of people we meet.**

**The Parish Team acknowledges that the task before us is quite considerable, indeed daunting. Our resources are limited. Nobody knows how the virus will behave next. We are in a time of uncertainty. We therefore need to proceed with caution, one step at a time.**

**While we may be able to open both churches for private prayer at the end of the month, we will not be able to open both churches for public Mass at the end of the month.**

**St Kevin's will open first for public Mass. It will be easier to organise because there is 2 metre spacing in the main aisles. It will also be relatively easy to have a one-way system with different Entrance and Exit.**

**All of this of course depends on enough Volunteers being available for every time the church is open to the public. We need Stewards to help with physical distancing, and Cleaners to do the necessary sanitising after each use.**

**We need to be clear about this. There is no room for complacency: St Kevin's will only open if we have sufficient Volunteers signed up to make it possible safely to reopen.**

**St Kilian's will be more of a challenge to organise. There are many 'pinch' points. None of the aisles is 2 metres wide. Benches are very close together. Hand sanitising space at the main door is limited and exit will have to be through the emergency exits either side of the sanctuary so as to have a one-way system. Again, whatever is possible will depend on an adequate crew of Volunteers being available for Stewarding and Cleaning every time the church is open to the public.**

**Again, we need to be clear on this. There is no room for complacency: St Kilian's will only open if we have sufficient Volunteers signed up to make it possible safely to reopen.**

**Someone may be tempted to say: All these measures are not necessary. Leave it to people's common sense. People will behave responsibly in church.**

**Well, the fact is, regulations are mandatory and have to be implemented to make it safe for people to be in the church environment in the context of Covid-19.**

**And, the fact is, that I, on behalf of the Parish, will have to sign a Church Readiness Form for each of our churches, which says that we have understood and implemented the Guidance from**

**the Bishops along with the Return to Work Protocol from the Government, before we are allowed to reopen. Further, our Insurance Policy will cover us provided we have taken the necessary reasonable precautions to protect against what is now a known threat.**

**Many of our Parishioners and Lay Ministers are in the older age cohort. The Department of Health continues to strongly recommend that people who are over 70 or have a condition which makes them extremely medically vulnerable should stay at home as much as possible. On that account, some of our Parishioners may feel that they would be better advised to stay at home for the time being.**

**It is very much the personal choice of each one whether to come to church from the end of the month as churches reopen. We are all advised to be cautious and prudent in respect of the activities in which we engage, because of Covid-19. The dispensation from the Sunday and Holyday obligation is extended for the time being.**

**I am appealing, therefore, for the assistance the Parish needs for Volunteers to help reopen our 2 churches and to do so in such a way that people will feel safe while in church. The Parish needs Volunteers for Stewarding and Cleaning in our 2 churches every time they are used. Appropriate training will take place. And this process will have to continue for the foreseeable future.**

**If you are willing and able to help, please fill in the Volunteer Form on the Parish Website. We will need to make a Rota for each church.**

**Reopening our 2 churches gives the whole Parish Family an opportunity to pull together in a new way.**

**Thank you. Until next time.  
Slán agus beannacht.**