



GREEK CATHEDRAL AGHIA SOPHIA
COVID-19 GUIDANCE
(PLEASE READ CAREFULLY BEFORE ATTENDING)

Following the most recent *Covid 19 Guidance for the safe use of places of worship* published by the Government, we have been open to the public for services from Sunday 5th July. While we have carried out & updated a Risk Assessment of our premises to ensure that we comply with the latest Health & Safety advice & we have taken every step possible to ensure that our Cathedral is COVID-secure, the virus is highly contagious, and can spread more easily in communal and enclosed spaces, such as churches, than outside. If you choose to worship with us, you do so at your own risk. In order to make an informed decision about whether or not to visit our church or to attend one of our services, we urge you to consider the following guidelines carefully. Please avoid using public transport to get to us if at all possible. For further details please go to <https://bit.ly/30oodZ>.

Please note: Our Sunday services will be at 9.30am - 12.30pm. If you wish to enter the church, please arrive early to avoid disappointment. Once we reach full capacity (80 people), we will not be able to let anyone else in. Based on the latest government guidelines published on 3rd August 2020, we are making it compulsory for anyone entering the church to wear a face mask.

COVID-19 symptoms

- If you are showing symptoms of COVID-19 (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell) you should not attend our place of worship due to the risk that you pose to others; you should self-isolate at home immediately with other members of your household. Remote participation should be considered, for example by live streaming. We reserve the right to deny access to anyone showing signs of being symptomatic. This is for the protection of other worshippers as well as our own staff, clergy and volunteers.
- If you are self-isolating due to a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 in your household, or because you have been requested to do so by NHS Test and Trace, you should participate in our service remotely and not come to church.

Restrictions on capacity & seating arrangements

- Having considered the size and layout of our Cathedral we are able to allow a **maximum of 80 people** inside our premises at any one time. From Sunday 9th August we will be holding our regular Sunday service at the usual time of 9.30am. We will not exceed our capacity.

- **Entrance will be on a first-come-first-served basis.** Once capacity is reached, we will not allow anyone else to enter the church, even if some of the original entrants choose to leave. This is necessary in order to minimise the risk of cross-contamination from individuals' coming into contact with surfaces, including seats & icons.
- All individuals entering the church must find a place to sit. In order to minimise the risk of transmission, we urge you to **remain seated throughout the service** and not to move around the church unless you wish to take Holy Communion or to exit the premises.
- Infants must sit on their parents' lap throughout the service and not be allowed to wander.
- Holy Communion will go ahead as normal but should you choose to go forward with it, it is at your own risk. **Please wait for the priest to call you forward to take the Holy Communion.** This will be done by row. Please remain seated until it is your turn and do not rush forward. Please return to your seat once you have taken Holy Communion.
- Individuals from the same **households must sit together** where possible and keep 1+ metres apart from others/other households.
- **Seats marked with an X should be left empty.**

Social distancing & hygiene safety

- Inside the Cathedral please adhere to social distancing of at least 2 metres or 1 metre with risk mitigation between households.
- Please obey the queuing and one-way systems in operation both outside and inside the church. Follow the floor markings and/or signage available.
- If the church has reached its full capacity, you will be asked to wait outside in a queue, keeping 1+ m apart.
- Do not cross any of the barriers installed either inside or outside the Cathedral.
- When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, or the crook of your sleeved arm (not your hands) if you don't have a tissue, and throw the tissue away hygienically immediately afterwards. Then wash your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using hand sanitiser.
- We have hand sanitisers available inside the Cathedral and we urge you to clean your hands thoroughly upon entering and leaving the church.

Face coverings

- From 8 August, face coverings will be required by law to be worn in a greater number of public indoor settings including places of worship. We are making it compulsory for all our parishioners to wear face masks upon entering the Cathedral.
- We have face masks available in the Cathedral if you have forgotten to bring your own. Please speak to a Warden upon entering the church and they will assist you.
- Face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk, including social distancing, minimising time spent in contact, and increasing hand and surface washing. These other measures remain the best ways of managing risk in a place of

worship. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you and your household should isolate at home: wearing a face covering does not change this.

- Worshippers, volunteers and staff, may choose to wear face coverings to offer protection to others and if so, it is important to use them properly: thoroughly wash hands before putting them on and taking them off. The key thing is they should cover the mouth and nose and fit well around the face.
- Face coverings should not be used by young children or those who may find it difficult to manage them correctly. For example, primary age children unassisted, or those with respiratory conditions.

Singing & chanting

- People should avoid singing, shouting and/or raising voices at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult or that may encourage shouting. This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission from aerosol and droplets.
- Therefore, spoken responses during worship should also not be in a raised voice.

The use of shared items & Holy Communion

- We will not prevent or discourage individuals from taking Holy Communion nor touching or kissing communal icons. However, this will be at individuals' own risk. We will be cleaning the liturgical spoon and icons with anti-bacterial spray on a regular basis to avoid transmission but we cannot guarantee that they will be virus-free.
- Please respect the Holy Communion queuing system. The priest/Warden will ask you to come forward row by row and you must remain seated until it is your turn. Please return to your seats after taking Holy Communion.
- Barriers and/or clear signage is in place in areas of the Cathedral which we deem to be at higher risk of transmitting the virus. Please respect these signs/barriers.
- Individuals should also avoid touching property belonging to others.
- Single use religious texts will be provided but they have to be removed and disposed of by the worshipper.
- Items owned by the individual to aid worship such as a religious text, can be brought in but should be removed again by the worshipper.

Holy bread & Holy water

- We will be offering prosphora to worshippers individually wrapped in plastic bags. Please do not handle more than one bag so as to avoid cross-contamination and do not pass on bags to others.
- The same rules apply to Holy Water. Pre-prepared bottles will be available to take home. We will only have a limited supply and so bottles will be given on a first-come-first-served basis.
- No other food or drink is allowed inside the Cathedral.

Individuals aged 70 and over

- Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions.
- Individuals who fall within this group are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household.

Young people and children

- Young children should be supervised by the parent or guardian. They should wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap and dry them thoroughly before coming to church or use hand sanitiser ensuring that all parts of the hands are covered.
- Pushchairs and buggies will not be permitted into the Cathedral due to restricted space available and because of social distancing rules. Please leave your pushchairs outside the church. We do not take responsibility for the loss of property inside or outside the Cathedral.

Individuals who are extremely clinically vulnerable/shielding

- Shielded patients are currently advised not to meet more than one person from outside of their own household, and therefore not currently advised to attend places of worship.
- Advice for both the clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable is however advisory and can choose how to manage their own risks.

Cash donations

- While we encourage donations, where possible please use our mobile contactless machines to give or place your coins in the available boxes. We will not be handling coins & we will be unable to provide you with change. We will have our money tray (diskos) available at the end of the service, so please give generously.

Toilet facilities

- As we cannot manage the risk of transmission in our public facilities, please note that our **toilets will remain closed** until further notice.

This guidance will be updated as and when further changes come into effect. We reserve the right to close should we deem our church to no longer be COVID-secure. We will continue to live stream our services.

Last updated 3rd August 2020