



**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 from 04 January* published by the Government (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) we will be opening again for communal worship under **Tier 5 Rules & Regulations**.

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 continues to be 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 in full knowledge of the increased risk of transmission when participating in indoor gatherings during a pandemic.** 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.

Please note: **We will be holding one Sunday Liturgy from 27<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 9.30am.**

### **Covid-19 symptoms**

- Upon entry, please **scan our QR code** & provide your **contact details** to the member of staff at the entrance to the Cathedral.
- A no contact **temperature check** will be made upon entry. Refusal to allow us to take your temperature may lead to refusal of entry.
- 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 60 people** inside our premises at any one time. 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. If you wish to enter the church, please arrive early to avoid disappointment. Once we reach full capacity, we will not be able to let anyone else in.
- **Verbal or physical abuse of our Clergy, volunteers and staff will not be tolerated.** We reserve the right to call the police and to refuse entry to anyone who behaves in an aggressive manner towards either inside or outside the Cathedral.
- 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.
- **Seats marked with an X should be left empty.**
- Individuals from the **same households must sit together** where possible and keep 2m apart from others/other households.
- Infants must sit on their parents' lap throughout the service and not be allowed to wonder.

## Social distancing & Hygiene

- Inside the Cathedral please adhere to **social distancing of at least 2m** or 1m 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.
- **In Tier 5 areas, people must not mingle indoors with anyone they do not live with or have formed a support bubble with.** This is against the law and the police will have the powers to enforce these legal limits, including to issue fines (fixed penalty notices) of £200, doubling for further breaches up to a maximum of £6,400.
- 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.

## Holy Communion

- 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.** Please remain seated until it is your turn and do not rush forward. Please return to your seat once you have taken Holy Communion. Those who wish to take Holy Communion will be called upon **row by row.**
- Obey the queueing system and maintain your distance whilst waiting to take **Holy Communion.**

## Face coverings

- Face masks are compulsory all our parishioners to wear face masks upon entering the Cathedral. We have a strict **“No mask, No entry” policy**, unless you have a letter showing that you are exempt on account of a medical condition.
- The key thing is that the face masks should cover the mouth and nose and fit well around the face.
- We have **free 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 masks must be worn at all times**, unless you have proof of exemption. If you refuse to adhere to the face masks, we reserve the right to ask you to leave.
- Face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk, including social distancing, minimizing 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, will wear face coverings to offer protection to others.
- **Face coverings are not compulsory for 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

- Individuals should 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.
- We will be offering **Holy Bread (prosfora)** 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.
- Infants must sit on their parents' lap and be supervised by them at all times.
- 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 exit of the Cathedral, 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 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021).