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Dear Fathers and Deacons,

I am pleased to attach herewith the Step 4 Guidance, provided by the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales.

It is most important that we exercise great caution in the implementation of this Step 4 Guidance. The wearing of face coverings is a protection for others, I urge most strongly that face coverings continue to be worn during the course of celebrations, in accord with the now well-established practice.

People may wish to make use of lateral flow tests before they attend Mass and this is especially recommended for such occasions as marriages when people are travelling from other areas.

I would ask you to note, in particular, the guidance on the re-introduction of congregational singing, the continuing suspension, for the time being, of both Communion under both kinds and the physical Sign of Peace.

With regard to the ministry of Deacons, it seems appropriate that Deacons, provided they are wearing face coverings and sanitise their hands beforehand, may now prepare the gifts at the altar.

Appendix 1 of the guidance provides a helpful summary of recommended actions, including the continuation of the following measures:

- Sanitising hands on entering churches and before liturgies
- Ensuring the continued use of face masks
- Ventilating buildings well
- Maintaining a good standard of cleaning

Regarding the use of parish premises for social activities, it will be essential for parishes to continue to carry out risk assessments for events and activities, and to review the arrangements for safe use of parish premises by private and commercial hirers. Claire Johnson will continue to support parishes in assessing these risks and planning for the safe use of premises, taking into account the space to be used, the nature of the activities to be resumed and the mitigations that can be implemented.

Once again, I do ask that caution is exercised at this time. Thank you for all that is being done to make our parish communities as safe as possible as we move to a new stage in our response to the pandemic.

With every Blessing,

+Richard