

THE RT HON SIR EDWARD LEIGH MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
10 Downing Street
London

2 November 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

I know that these are difficult times and the burden of decision-making must be all the greater, but I felt I must write to you on a matter of paramount importance.

During the previous lockdown, Catholics – like many other people of faith in this country – had to go without the familiar pattern of prayer and worship which is central to our lives.

While this was extremely difficult for the Catholic laity, it was understood that we faced an unknown virus and the priority was to protect the NHS and save lives. We now know significantly more about this virus and how to control it.

Since July, churches have made great efforts to introduce social distancing and ensure that public health requirements are met. Catholic parishes and thousands of individual volunteers have gone to great lengths and given up many hours to make churches safe. Some churches have only recently managed to reopen.

The announcement that communal worship is now to be forbidden again is particularly frustrating as we've seen **no evidence** that people meeting for church services are contributing to the spread of the virus in this country.

Anyone who has been to Mass recently will see that social distancing, cleansing, and masks are rigidly enforced. Why alienate a quiet, law-abiding part of the community?

It would be a great help if the Government would publish the evidence and scientific advice that led to the decision to close places of worship for services. If such evidence exists, I'm sure reasonable people will understand that restrictions – however regrettable – are understandable and necessary. Without such evidence, banning communal worship is a clearly disproportionate response.

Might I suggest a compromise? The Government could allow religious services as long as all those attending apply online beforehand. I know many churches are using these systems already.

As we continue the battle against this virus, it's vital the Government maintains public confidence in its measures. This must include proper consideration for the views and interests of the 4.5 million Catholics in this country, who have made great efforts to ensure public worship can take place safely.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edward Leigh".

The Rt Hon Sir Edward Leigh MP
President, Catholic Union of Great Britain