



**ZJEDNOCZENIE POLSKIE W WIELKIEJ BRYTANII.  
FEDERATION OF POLES IN GREAT BRITAIN C.I.O.**

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Dame Cressida Dick  
Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service  
[Comm.PO@met.police.uk](mailto:Comm.PO@met.police.uk)

12 April 2021

Dear Commissioner,

Polish communities throughout the UK were deeply shocked by the sight of the Metropolitan Police interrupting and sending home a Polish Catholic congregation in the Church of Christ the King in Balham on the most solemn day of the year, Good Friday. This is the day when we believe that Our Lord, Jesus Christ, suffered for our sins and died an agonizing death on the cross. It is a crucial part of the Easter weekend which is the most important feast in the Christian calendar. The shame and humiliation suffered by the priest and the shocked congregation, with their bewildered children, on this day, was shared not only by Polish Catholic parishes in the UK, but also by religious communities around the UK, and not only Christians.

Polish Catholic parishes throughout the country take scrupulous care during the pandemic to follow the rules and guidelines laid down by the Government and reinforced by our Bishops and the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales. A risk assessment is made of how many people can be accommodated in the church building based on its floor measurements in accordance with guidelines, parishioners are required to book tickets in advance prior to the day of worship, every alternative pew is left empty, worshippers are guided to their seats in the remaining pews to ensure that social distancing is maintained between family households or individuals, adults must wear masks, physical contact of the peace sign is dropped and there is a controlled flow of movement as parishioners come forward to take Holy Communion and return to their seats by an alternative route. Those unable to enter the church are requested to disperse and pray at home. We accept the overriding need to follow government guidelines to combat the pandemic.

We understand that this procedure was followed at the Church of Christ the King on Good Friday. When the police arrived on the scene, apparently because of seeing parishioners standing outside the church building, they informed one of the priests outside the building that the church was overcrowded and that this most solemn of services had to be instantly terminated. The shocked priest invited the police spokesman into the church to explain the problem to the congregation. It is possible that the police, complying with government rulings and your guidelines, found evidence of some transgression involving insufficient social distancing. If so, we respect their judgement in this. Unfortunately, the police spokesman gave no further details of what these transgressions could be and advised the congregation that the building is overcrowded, and all must immediately leave or face a £200 fine. The congregation was stunned but immediately complied with the police order. The police made no attempt, despite the solemnity of the occasion, to seek a different solution, such as a warning or reprimand, or a re-adjustment in the seating arrangements.

While we understand and respect the fact that the police were acting within their guidelines in their interpretation of the rules, we believe that they could certainly have shown more understanding where a law-abiding congregation may have inadvertently transgressed the law. This was not an illegal social gathering or a deliberate challenge to rules covering Covid-19. Current legislation does not lay down any specific figure for an act of collective worship in a building but requires the need to conduct a proper risk assessment of the building's capacity. The parish council at the Church had made such a detailed risk assessment earlier. The police at the scene, with respect, had not, because they had already given notice of the need to depart, before they entered the building.

We know that Polish parishes, like other religious communities in the United Kingdom, are trying conscientiously to cope with the changing rules and the extraordinary circumstances occasioned by the pandemic, as indeed are the police themselves. Sometimes they may unwittingly get things wrong. In view of that, we would urge in the interests of retaining mutual trust between the police and the church-going public, that in future the police should find a more conciliatory and less confrontational way of enforcing the restrictions imposed temporarily on our religious communities by the need to control the pandemic.

We are grateful that the visit on Sunday by your officers to the congregation of this Church has helped achieve mutual understanding and we trust that this unfortunate incident will lead to a closer understanding and cooperation in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Włodzimierz Mier-Jedrzejowicz  
President  
Federation of Poles in Great Britain