

Dear Friends,

Well the novelty really is starting to wear off now, isn't it? It would be lovely to hear a Prime Ministerial announcement that just said, 'Okay everyone, it's back to normal!' But here in Lancashire we are still some way from the peak and we simply cannot tell the level of impact that COVID-19 will have on our communities, our parishes and even our own families. It's so important to go on sticking to advice and guidelines, modelling responsible citizenship, encouraging our people and above all serving the vulnerable.

Today we have:

- A series of short news items
- Advice on Supporting People in Bereavement

Any question or queries, please email: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org. **Please also email if you are unwell or self-isolating with a clear idea of timescale if you can give it.**

We have another video message to view today, [this one is from Bishop Jill](#) and comes with the usual reminder that, like previous messages from the senior clergy, it was recorded before the lockdown.

Short news items

A Cross in the Window. Will you be making a cross for your window this Palm Sunday? We continue to promote our idea and hope it will take off with our churches and with other denominations too. It's a wonderful opportunity to witness to people in your neighbourhood at this time. There is now a short promotional video (just 16 seconds!) also available that you can watch and share on social media to encourage family, friends and neighbours to take part too. [More details including a link to the video here.](#)

The Financial Assistance Group has suspended consideration of applications for grants over £2000 during the current pandemic. Applications for grants under £2000 can still be considered, especially if they relate to costs of finding new ways to worship and serve in the current situation. For more information email Archdeacon Mark: Mark.Ireland@Blackburn.Anglican.Org

The **Church Buildings Council** in Church House (CBC) has issued advice in a Q&A form on managing a closed building. It can be found [here](#).

Letters of Authorisation. Some clergy are concerned about being stopped by Police when out and about on essential pastoral work. We are advised that normal clerical wear should be sufficient to prevent you being challenged by Police as clergy are keyworkers. However if you are really worried about this and would like a letter of authorisation, please email: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org.

Being secure on Zoom. Zoom has been a lifesaver for many in terms of keeping in touch, holding meetings and making decisions, but some questions have come up recently about its security. We have received advice as follows:

- Do not make meetings or classrooms public. In Zoom, there are two options to make a meeting private: require a meeting password or use the waiting room feature and control admittance of guests.
- Do not share a link to a teleconference or classroom on an unrestricted publicly available social media post. Provide the link directly to specific people.
- Manage screensharing options. In Zoom, change screensharing to “Host Only.”
- Ensure users are using the updated version of remote access/meeting applications. In January 2020, Zoom updated their software. In their security update, the teleconference software provider added passwords by default for meetings and disabled the ability to randomly scan for meetings to join. The latest app is being installed and reported by Zoom.

Advice on supporting people in bereavement

During the pandemic the experience of death and bereavement is going to be complex. The number of deaths in Lancashire could double in some areas of the county, as a result of the additional deaths due to COVID-19.

Clergy are experienced and highly skilled in working with bereaved families, but it is worth reflecting on our practice and recognising that there may be some unusual or extreme circumstances we need to take into account.

- It is likely that a significant number of people will encounter death for the first time in their lives during the pandemic. These are individuals who may have no experience of someone close to them dying, the process of registering a death, organising a funeral or being aware of the reality of grief.
- There may be families who will have multiple bereavements in a short space of time, increasing their risk of abnormal grief.
- Some people will die earlier than would have otherwise been expected. This applies not only to those who are relatively young, but also older people with underlying health conditions whose lives are shortened by being infected with COVID-19. This may lead to people seeking to blame individuals or institutions for issues such as not doing enough to diagnose the infection or adequately manage the impact on the individual, or a failure of social distancing. This focus on apportioning blame may inhibit the process of dealing with their grief.
- With the numbers allowed to attend a funeral being severely restricted, this key ritual will not be available to a significant number of people. This could impede the grief process and, in extreme cases, may result in some not accepting the fact of the death.
- The restriction of mourners to family members only may cause considerable problems in blended families, where it may be difficult to decide who counts as a close family member; or in those families where there is a history of domestic abuse or violence, where it is friends rather than family who have been the most significant support network and may be the people most affected by the death.
- It is likely that children and young people will be kept away from funerals which may exacerbate their concerns and fears about death and dying.

Add to this the stress of self-isolation and the current levels of uncertainty around when restrictions will be lifted and people will be able to move around freely, there is a significant risk that a number of people will experience serious ongoing issues arising from their bereavement.

There will be an additional burden on clergy and licenced lay ministers as they may be asked to handle multiple funerals. It is important to think about how you will manage:

- Do you know how your funeral directors are tackling the process of arranging and managing funerals? Now is the time to get in touch to discuss the challenges you are both facing and where possible agreeing ways you can work together.
- The way we make contact with families and personalise a funeral during the current restrictions is not the normal way we work. Think about how you might hold a pastoral telephone conversation in a way that gathers the information you need in order to conduct a service sensitively.
- There may be times when a face to face meeting with a bereaved family member is essential, for example after the death of a child or where there are complex issues that need to sensitively addressed – but think carefully and manage the risk as best you can. Ensure you follow the guidance issued previously about pastoral visiting where it is deemed essential.
- Think about how you will conduct the service with dignity and compassion whilst maintaining physical distancing. You may need to be more directive and give far less choice to the family in what they are able to do. Ensure you know and follow your local crematorium guidelines.
- Who will take funerals if you are ill or self-isolating? Talk in your local network of parishes and make sure you all know who is able to respond and how to contact them.
- Think about how you will recharge after taking multiple funerals, possibly more than one in a day or a number in a week. Who can you talk to and share with? How will you unwind and reconnect with your new routine of life?
- Do you know where you can direct people who you are worried to get additional support. There are several websites that offer useful resources

Finance advice:

<https://www.gov.uk/bereavement-support-payment>

Adult bereavement:

Many of the main disease-specific charities will have useful information about bereavement as part of the information and services they provide.

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Child and young adult bereavement:

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Finally, it is important to start to plan ahead for the time when restrictions are lifted.

- Think about hosting memorial services for families on an individual level or on a parish basis. What is needed? What would it look like? How will you invite people? Think about this now so you can ensure you collect the relevant contact details from families at the time of the funeral

- Build links with bereavement support services locally so you know where to refer those people who are struggling and need additional help.
- Think about establishing or connecting the bereaved into some informal on-going bereavement support in the church, such as a coffee drop in, or an evening group that those who are grieving can come to and tell their stories and know they are not alone. Are there people you can work with on this – lay ministers in the parish, volunteers from the congregation, clergy in your area holding permission to officiate, local bereavement support networks already established or from a local hospice?
- How will you care for yourself and your family? This will have an impact on all of us and this needs to be acknowledged and addressed. If you are struggling, seek help sooner rather than later.

*Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.

Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Amen.

Yours,
The Coronavirus Task Group