

Dear Friends,

Today, Maundy Thursday, we recall the new commandment that Jesus gives us, to love one another (John 13, 34). As always Jesus' words are backed up by his actions in two astonishing acts of love which many of you would normally be recalling liturgically tonight. First he demonstrates servant love as he kneels to wash the disciples feet. Then he demonstrates self-giving love as he gives us the everlasting memorial of his dying and rising in the gift of the Eucharist.

As we look around our nation today we can see that serving, self-giving love modelled in the lives of so many. We see it in our healthcare chaplains who are working so hard and heroically to minister to staff and patients in incredibly testing times. We see it in the healthcare professionals who are risking their own wellbeing as they care for people who are seriously unwell. And we see it of course in our parishes where the agility that many of you are bringing to ministry is meeting so many spiritual and material needs.

Today we also say goodbye to one of the great servants of the Diocese of Blackburn. No one can remember a time when Elaine Hargreaves, our Head of Central Services, was not at the heart of the life of the DBF, but today, following a Zoom 'party' with colleagues, she moves into retirement. We thank her for all that she has offered and there will be more information next week about how her work will be covered in the future.

Local Networks

The number of COVID-19 cases in Lancashire is now rising quickly and with it the pastoral demands on priests. We have asked Area Deans to work with incumbents to arrange themselves into Local Networks. This should enable clergy to support each other either in the case of sickness or of an unmanageable pastoral workload. If you are not yet in a Local Network please contact your Area Dean as a matter of urgency. This will become more and more important as we start to see the impact of the virus in our county over the next few weeks.

National Debate

We are aware of much conversation about how the Church of England is managing the current lockdown. Please can we request that you adhere only to the advice from the Diocese of Blackburn that has been given through this briefing and don't start feeling the need to act on things picked up from social media or newspaper stories? That advice is now clearly organised in a compendium [on the Coronavirus pages](#) of the website. Note especially the advice given last week on pastoral visits and church buildings.

Daily Briefing

Tomorrow we will circulate a reflection for Good Friday written by Canon Rowena Pailing, Canon Missioner at our Cathedral. Unless there are major developments there will be no further briefings until Easter Tuesday.

HOWEVER... the Coronavirus email address will be closely monitored throughout the weekend and members of the task group are always available. Any question or queries, please email: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org.

Please also email if you are unwell or self-isolating.

And finally...

The stories of good things happening across our Diocese keep flooding in. Here are a few...

- We have heard from churches in Blackpool working jointly with the council and other local agencies to support, house and feed the homeless. [Read more](#) in a piece written by Rev. Peter Lillicrap about the initiative. There is also due to be a report about this on BBC Radio Lancashire on Sunday morning between 6-10am. Precise time not known but the programme is also [on BBC iPlayer after](#).
- Extracts of the Bishops' Easter messages will also feature in the same Sunday morning BBC Radio Lancashire programme and you can watch them in their entirety [now on YouTube](#) and at any time.
- [Read here](#) about a wonderful and ecumenical Stations of the Cross video initiative in Burnley and East Lancashire for Holy Week. Rev. Kat Gregory-Witham is also appearing on BBC Radio Lancashire tomorrow talking about the video. Again, precise time not known but it also runs between 6-10am [and is available here](#) after.
- Our #holyweekcross initiative ([reminder here](#)) has really taken off on Twitter and Facebook there is still time to do one of your own! A story will also go on [the news section](#) of the website soon with some examples posted to social media so far including a wonderful wooden rainbow cross placed in her garden by Caz Pinder, a student of our M:Power Urban Lay Leaders Training Centre at St James' Lower Darwen. It had a great impact on the rest of her street.
- And lastly, many events have been cancelled due to the virus outbreak of course but Spring Harvest is now running 'Spring Harvest Home', an online only conference, from Monday, April 13 to April 17. Bishop Jill is the keynote speaker on the opening evening. [Find out more here](#) (with links onwards for further information).

If you have an uplifting story to share in these times we want to hear from you. Email us o coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org with details of what it's about (see the Blackpool and Burnley stories above for what we mean). Attach some pictures to illustrate if you can and/or a link to anything related and relevant that can be found online, such as videos.

***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