

Dear Friends,

You may have seen some news reports that the current government lockdown, unprecedented in peacetime, is starting to have an impact and that the spread of the virus is slowing slightly. Should this be so, it would be good news. But please don't read too much into such reports. We need to go on staying at home as much as possible and do all we can to encourage and build each other up.

Above all we must give ourselves to the work of prayer. From tomorrow our 'Blackburn Prayers' will have a special intention around the current crisis. If you have not subscribed to receive our Daily Prayers email into your inbox, now may be the time. Simply [click the link here](#). Meanwhile, the entire month's prayers will also be available to download from [this page](#) shortly.

But before we continue we have another video message, recorded before the lockdown. This latest message is from Archdeacon David and can be viewed on the diocesan [YouTube channel here](#).

In today's briefing we have:

- An Idea for Holy Week (much more about Holy Week and Easter tomorrow)
- A word about post-Easter leave
- Advice about deliveries to people's homes
- Advice on the use of social media

Any question or queries, please email: [coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org](mailto:coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org). **Please also email if you are unwell or self-isolating, giving a start date and a potential length of time.**

### **An Idea for Holy Week – A Cross in the Window**

Many will miss the blessing and distribution of Palm Crosses on Sunday. In Blackburn we would like to encourage every Christian home to make a cross in the best way they can and place it in their window, leaving it there throughout Holy Week. It can be of paper, card, wood – allow people to be as imaginative as they like. It will be a sign to our communities that, in the cross of Christ, all the world's ills are healed.

Tomorrow we will distribute a pack with plenty of ideas and resources that you can suggest for your people so that they can keep Holy Week in their own homes.

### **Post-Easter Leave**

The spike of COVID-19 cases in Lancashire is due at Eastertide, just at the time when many clergy will have planned post-Easter leave. Please ensure that within clergy clusters, you have funeral cover for Easter Week and be in touch with the Area Dean if this is proving difficult. Given the restrictions on travel, some of you may choose to postpone Easter leave until later in the year (but make sure you take it). Some of the senior clergy have postponed leave and can be available if funeral ministry starts to place pressures on remaining clergy.

## **Hand delivery to homes**

Please note that the [Church of England advice](#) has been updated and now encourages the use of Royal Mail rather than hand deliveries to people's doors because of the risk of cross-infection. This obviously does not include food parcels. We know that we can rely on church leaders to use wisdom and good judgement in making such decisions.

## **Advice for parishes on the use of social media**

This is a short summary of good practice guidelines in a social media context. It has been compiled by our communications manager specifically to advise our clergy, office holders and others associated with the Diocese already active on social media (or thinking about it!) during the current coronavirus outbreak.

The common-sense points which follow should help you fulfil, with confidence, your role as an effective and responsible online ambassador for your local parish, the wider Church and our Christian faith at this difficult time in our nation's history.

It is true to say that social media platforms are being used in new and exciting ways to engage with communities. Many parishes are engaging with some of these for the very first time. This should be encouraged.

Meanwhile, while we know social media can be good for maintaining connections, it can also be a terrible source of harm, anxiety, fake news and angst. So please consider carefully not just about what you choose to read yourself, but also what you write and put out in the public domain.

We would want to advise against any use of social media which may promote upset or discord at this time. Please also ensure social media content associated with you is consistent with your role and with Christian values of love, tolerance, truth and forgiveness.

Words have power. At this difficult time there should also be opportunities to reassure people while also sharing our Christian faith.

*Three ways to remember social media is different from more traditional forms of media:*

- **DIALOGUE:** it is a two-way conversation;
- **IMMEDIACY:** it's happening in real time
- **NETWORKS:** it depends on our network of friends

In this context, please be wise: If you engage in an online discussion on Facebook, Twitter, or anywhere else remember this: everything you say is public and shareable, possibly even something which originates in a private chatroom initially.

Also consider carefully, in the context of the coronavirus outbreak, whether the content you are engaging with, sharing or commenting on is going to be received well by other people; perhaps inadvertently adding to the stress or pressure another person is experiencing? We all have different levels of tolerance. If in doubt, don't forward or retweet.

Guard your own back too. As well as being careful about what you engage with personally, be careful who you 'follow' and 'like'. Do also feel free to ignore or even block people who 'troll' you or are just plain rude! This is a difficult and stressful enough time without those kinds of added pressures.

And please just try to be loving and kind as much as possible. If the powers and authorities make decisions which you disagree with, you should be able to voice your concern of course but please remember to disagree well; always do it in a way that is factually accurate, while keeping in mind that they too may be under considerable stress and strain.

The immediacy of social media is one of its benefits of course – we can respond quickly to questions, correct misunderstandings or just give our perspective about a breaking story. Responding quickly doesn't mean doing so without due consideration however.

You may not have thought about things in this way before, but if you choose to identify online in your Church of England role, whatever role that is, others will likely see you as a Church of England representative or ambassador.

If your comment is in the 'public domain' it could therefore pique the interest of the media if it is considered 'newsworthy' depending on what you might say, so please consider this carefully too when you are posting.

Before posting always think:

- Is this my story to share?
- Would I want this on the front page of a newspaper or featuring on a news website?
- Would I want God to read this?
- Is what I'm posting just gossip?

Before you post anything, spend a while listening to others; maybe getting a feel for the tone of the particular forum you are involved in at the same time as giving careful thought to how you might then participate (if at all).

If this short summary of common-sense advice has been useful to you, as part of the national church 'Digital Charter' launched in 2019 you can also find further suggested advice about how to operate on social media in a Christian context [here](#).

**And finally...**

We finish with some words from one of our Diocesan priests about using this odd time of lockdown well. They write:

*"In the hermitage of your heart, see beauty, find comfort; simply be blessed. At least some of the time rest with Mary whilst so many others rush around with Martha. And know that you are loved and valued in this place."*

***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,

Bishop Philip and the Coronavirus Task Group