

Dear Friends

Welcome to the first daily briefing on the Coronavirus pandemic. Today we will address the following:

- Worship
- Occasional Offices
- Pastoral Visiting
- The Day of Prayer on Sunday March 22nd

Over the coming days we will address other issues of concern including parish finances, parish governance, clergy care and wellbeing, community ministry etc. This is a fast-changing situation with new advice coming out all the time so please keep an eye on the FAQ section of the Church of England webpage: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

We will be closely monitoring a special email address where all queries can be sent. This is coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org

It is important also to listen to advice that comes from this source over and above anything you might find on the internet or from other Dioceses and organisations. In particular it is incumbent upon us all to use social media wisely at this time, both in terms of what we post and what we believe.

Please note: if you are self-isolating, please email: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org and include the date from which your isolation begins.

Worship

The Archbishops have asked that all public worship cease. The danger of infection caused by significant numbers of Christians gathering together, especially given the age range of our people, is so great that it outweighs even the solemn duty we have to worship the Saviour corporately. **This means that your normal pattern of public worship, including Sundays, is to be suspended immediately.**

The Archbishops also strongly urge that churches remain open as places of prayer. They encourage prayer at various times of day and also suggest celebrations of the Eucharist. But, however tenacious the devotion of our people, we must not read this as allowing 'business as usual.'

Numbers involved at such gatherings should be very small indeed. Times should not be advertised as we are not actively to encourage public gatherings. You should ensure that there is a safe distance of at least one but preferably two metres between people. Proper hygiene measures regarding the washing of hands and vessels should be observed. It is vital to follow the spirit as well as the letter of the Archbishops' Guidance.

Moreover we should be actively encouraging people aged over 70 to stay in their homes at this time and supporting them pastorally in so doing. No one should feel they 'should' or 'ought' to go to anything and the prayers we now offer are on behalf of, not with, our communities.

At the same time people should be strongly encouraged to maintain and develop their devotional life in their own homes. We will point to and produce resources that can help with this in the coming days.

Occasional Offices

A number of the requests for advice sent to the Task Group have been regarding occasional offices; and for good reason because these are important markers in the life of the church and the people we serve.

The advice at present is that funerals will still go ahead, but we are to encourage families to keep the party in attendance as small as possible. Social distancing measures are to be implemented and due regard must be given to protecting the elderly and vulnerable groups. Working closely with funeral directors is always good practice but will now be even more important to ensure that all involved feel comfortable with the arrangements made.

For a couple due to be married, wedding services can take place but must again be subject to the guidance on social distancing and should be as small as possible. The national Church of England advice reminds us that only 5 people are needed for a marriage service to happen: the priest, the couple and two witnesses.

The reading of banns cannot happen at the moment because there are no public services. Marriages which do go ahead must therefore be done under a common licence. This applies equally for uncompleted banns as it does for banns not yet read at all. Please contact the registry for advice as to how to proceed on this basis.

We have been told to look out for further advice from the national Church of England on these important legal areas and this will be communicated to you when we receive it.

Pastoral Visiting

Pastoral support for individuals is an important part of role of the church but in light of the current pandemic guidance, face to face pastoral care should only be undertaken if seen as essential and where the risks of doing so to both the person being visited and the person doing the visit have been carefully considered and appropriately managed.

During the pandemic it is inappropriate to stop ALL pastoral face to face visiting. Equally, it is inappropriate to simply continue all face to face visiting as would have happened prior to the pandemic. If a person is in hospital or hospice then it is appropriate to ask the chaplaincy team serving those healthcare settings to provide the pastoral care under the guidance of the healthcare professionals in these institutions. There is no justification during this

pandemic for parish clergy or pastoral care visitors to be undertaking hospital or hospice visits. Contact for each key NHS Trust are outlined below:

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust	01254733632
Wigan, Wrightington and Leigh Hospitals NHS Trust	01942 822324
University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Trust	01524 519231
Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS	01772 522435
Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	01253 956299

Managing the risk

Before any face to face meeting ask the following questions:

- Why are we holding a face to face meeting - could pastoral support be offered over the phone, by email or virtually, through shared prayers or a streamed act of worship?
- Is it essential that we meet face to face now, or could the situation wait for a time when risk could be mitigated further?

Deciding what is an essential face to face meeting will be a matter for the individuals involved and their perception of the level of risk involved in such a meeting.

- Ensure the person making the visit is fit and well and, as far as possible, has not knowingly been in contact with COVID-19. If there is any doubt do not visit. If the pastoral need is urgent – such as someone approaching the end of their lives – someone else should provide the pastoral support.
- Ensure the person being visited is not in self isolation because of contact with COVID-19. If there is any doubt or there are concerns, do not visit and meet face to face, but offer pastoral support in other ways.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water as you enter the building for at least twenty seconds
- Remain at least 1 meter (ideally 2 metres) away from the person
- If at all possible, avoid physical contact – if anointing is deemed essential use disposable gloves and dispose of the gloves immediately after use in a bin before leaving the house.
- Offer communion only in one kind as per Bishops' Guidance
- Wash hands with warm soap and water for at least 20 seconds before leaving the house
- Where at all possible limit a face to face visit to 30 minutes or less and limit the number of people in the room to allow for an appropriate distance to be kept between you all.
- If a person is being barrier nursed follow the guidance of the healthcare professionals looking after the individual and if you are told not to visit please follow that guidance.

Ensure you have the contact details for the person visiting and that they have your contact details. Inform each other immediately if either you or they are diagnosed with COVID-19 or are in contact with a case of COVID-19 and start the process of self-isolation as outlined in the government guidance. If in doubt contact NHS 111 – do not go to a healthcare

facility or a GP surgery unless directed to do by a healthcare professional.

If you are unsure consult the advice given by Public Health England:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

Day of Prayer

Bishop Jill writes:

“This Sunday is a National Day of Prayer and Action for the Coronavirus epidemic. In our nation, we have seen astonishing answers to prayer at times of national crisis. On 4th August 1918, George V called for a National Day of Prayer, 100 days later the armistice was signed to end the First World War. On 22nd May 1940, George VI called for a National Day of Prayer, this was followed by the “miracle of Dunkirk” where miraculous numbers of Allied troops were rescued. We are asking for God to stop the spread of this virus, to protect all those whose lives and livelihoods are at threat, to give our government great wisdom. May he banish fear and sow seeds of faith and hope that cause us to serve outwards as a community and nation. We encourage you to use this opportunity to pray, act and to light a candle of hope”.

Resources can be found here: <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/stories/10-ideas-help-your-church-continue-worship-while-not-gathered>

And Finally...

Please stay safe! Non-essential meeting, events, parish away days, retreats and gathering should all be cancelled. The Bishops and Archdeacons are exercising the discipline of not all meeting in person to avoid cross-infection and clergy also should refrain from gathering in groups of more than two or three. Please follow closely all the guidance about hygiene.

And above all – keep praying! For our parishes, our nation, our world.

***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 the nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.***

Yours,

Bishop Philip and the Coronavirus Task Group