

19th March 2020

Dear Friends

It is really important that you keep reading these daily briefings. I am conscious that this is another long update and they will get shorter I am sure, but we are in a fast-moving situation and things are happening at great speed. If you missed yesterday's briefing, please look it up on the website.

Today we have updates and advice on the following areas:

- Update on Funerals
- News of the cancellation of the Chrism Eucharist
- Parish governance
- Day of prayer

There are, we know, other immediate concerns that many of you share and where we are awaiting guidance from the central church. These include baptism, though it should be assumed that all non-emergency baptisms are postponed.

We are also hearing numerous concerns about the ambiguity of advice regarding worship and, along with others, have written to ask for clarity. Fresh guidance is promised soon and we will pass this on as soon as we have it.

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 . ***Please email at once if you are self-isolating, telling us the date that this began.***

The General Situation

Events are moving with incredible pace. Schools are soon to close, the armed forces are on standby and our freedoms will no doubt be curtailed even more in the days and weeks ahead. Whilst trusting always in the compassion of God and avoiding any sense of panic, we must be aware of the danger caused by the Coronavirus. It is a new virus against which we have no immunity. When it gets out of control, as in northern Italy, there are high levels of mortality. When people follow instructions and act wisely, as in

China, the situation can be controlled. We each bear a personal responsibility for the level of the crisis our nation will face, and it is incumbent upon those in Christian leadership to set a strong example and act wisely. That includes avoiding non-essential association and unnecessary travel. If you have not already done so, go through your diary now and delete all meetings and engagements that are not necessary.

With gatherings now being strongly discouraged we are also contacting all organisers of upcoming events we have promoted around the Diocese to check if they are now cancelled or postponed, so we can update the website and other communications channels.

Clayton House will only retain a small number of essential staff who cannot work from home and no meetings or events will take place there.

Funerals

There is very helpful updated guidance from the Church of England on funerals which can be found here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

Cancellation of the Cathedral Chrism Eucharist

Bishop Julian writes:

One of the key services that was planned for the near future was, of course, our Chrism Eucharist in the Cathedral. This is a hugely significant service in the life of the Diocese, and central to the yearly renewal of ordination vows as deacons and priests in fellowship and before God.

You will not be surprised to hear that this service has been postponed until further notice. It is my hope that we might be able to hold the service much later in the year, but I am not in a position to give an answer on when that might be at this time.

May I encourage you to make time during Holy Week to renew your ordination promises in private, for which I attach a liturgy you could follow.

Parochial Governance and APCMs

By now you will know that the Church of England has decided to suspend public worship. This is in keeping with government guidelines. This does not mean, however, that the Church is closed. We are seeking to keep our buildings open for prayer and community service. There will be several implications for how we maintain and enable our institutional life to continue nationally, as a diocese and in parish. These notes are

intended to offer guidance to help you the 'living stones' (1 Peter 2:5) to be the Church in our parishes.

APCM etc

We are approaching the season of the Annual Church Meetings. This meeting is required by our Church Representation Rules and the Churchwardens Measure 2001 and with new regulations this year should take place before the end of May. It is preceded by a meeting where churchwardens are elected and is the meeting at which new church officers are elected for the year ahead. Clearly, the pandemic has led to advice about gatherings that mean these meetings will probably not be able to happen. The Diocesan Bishop has today extended the time for such elections.

The general effect of the instrument Bishop Julian has signed and dated extends the time for parishes to hold their annual meetings to the end of October, with current office holders (churchwardens, deanery synod representatives and PCC members) remaining in office longer than they would otherwise do so.

Deanery synod representatives elected in 2017 will remain in office until 30 November 2020 (instead of 30 June 2020). This is to prevent the problems that would otherwise arise if dioceses had to ascertain the electorate for the House of Laity of the General Synod on the basis of parish elections taking place up to 31 May.

It is possible that the elections to the General Synod that are due to take place this summer will not now go ahead. However, no decision has yet been taken about that; and we would need Parliament to pass legislation to prevent the current General Synod from being automatically dissolved later this year. Please be assured that we are giving this issue significant priority. We will provide an update as soon as there is anything to report.

There has also been an enquiry about the revision of the electoral roll. New people may be added to the roll in the normal way but it is anticipated that in line with the above it is expected that the roll will continue in existing form until an APCM can take place.

A consequence of the above is the likely need to postpone Visitation services at which churchwardens are admitted to office. Again, we will advise you soon of this.

PCC meetings

It seems unlikely that PCC meetings will take place in the normal form for some time. You may feel able to conduct some business by email and it is possible to use various electronic means to hold meetings by Skype, Zoom or Conference Call. So long as these meetings are recorded by minutes in the usual way or can be audio recorded for

transcription this would be valid. However, it may well be that you should be considering how much work may be delegated to your PCC Standing Committee, who can have significant executive powers where necessary. If the Standing Committee need to meet in person, on the assumption that body is normally no more than six people, this should prove feasible.

With regard to small gatherings which are absolutely essential to keep key church life viable we recommend the following;

Meeting protocol

Meetings of less than 6 people. Ask: is this is an essential meeting? Can it be done remotely? If there is a need to meet face to face ensure it is in a place where hand washing at the beginning and end of the meeting is possible and where the space is large enough to enable all to sit comfortably separate from each other. The meeting should be as short as possible.

Ideally before the meeting there should be a phone call asking each attendee if they are well, are they self-isolating and are comfortable to meet.

As we all realise, this is a developing situation and at a senior diocesan level officers will meet daily to consider how best to advise and support you in the weeks ahead.

There is a further attachment to this email, the Parish Continuity Plan, which gives essential advice for contingencies in the weeks ahead.

Thank you for all you do for the sake of the gospel.

Livestreaming

As we continue to adapt to the current situation many churches are looking to technology to continue to provide services and other gatherings online. Some of our churches are already set up for livestreaming. If you plan to run services this way email communicate@blackburn.anglican.org with the link to the page where the service will be shown so we can keep adding them to our website for others to watch too.

There is also advice available on livestreaming, if this is new to your church or if you want a refresher on keeping your church connected. [This page](#) of the national CofE website has links to register for ongoing online webinar and Q and A sessions to help you further.

A new beginners guide to going live with your service or event for free is also [now available here](#)

Caring for Yourself

We will be seeking in the days ahead to ring round all our clergy to ensure that you are well, that you have no particular anxieties and that you have received and acted upon the advice that is being sent out. Meanwhile if you wish to be in touch at any time, please email the address above or ring Bishop Julian's office (01254 248234) or Bishop Philip (07919 180788).

Video from Bishop Julian

Last, but not least, Bishop Julian has recorded a message for people across the Diocese of Blackburn in response to the Coronavirus outbreak. This is the first of a series of messages from senior clergy in the Diocese over the coming weeks. You can watch it [here](#) and make you sure you subscribe to our channel for alerts about future messages.

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:

Graeme Pollard, David Picken, Ronnie Semley, Dave Champness, Susan Salt, Louise Hunter, Sam Cheesman