

Dear Friends,

One thing that we are most certainly learning is that unlocking is going to be more challenging than locking down! Increasingly Government is operating by asking people to make informed local decisions rather than compelling them to obey regulations, and whilst this greater freedom will be welcome by many, it will leave church leaders with difficult decisions to make. It sadly also means that there will be questions that as a Task Group we are unable to answer, something compounded by Government advice which can be hard to follow or even contradictory. However we will continue to offer all the guidance we can and next week will issue some guidance on the kind of decisions that will need to be made between now and late June.

The Indian variant of the virus continues to cause concern in some parts of our Diocese, especially Blackburn and Burnley and it is important that we play our part in urging local people to have the vaccine when offered.

But at the same time, we continue to hear endless wonderful stories of the imaginative ministry going on across the Diocese and are constantly inspired by the way ministry continues to flourish in these strange days.

Unlock: The Video

This short video with all three Bishops and Carolyn Barton explores our Unlock themes of lament, thanksgiving and mission. It would be great if it could be shown to congregations where there are the facilities to do so either in church or online. You can view the video [here](#).

New Government Guidance

There is new Government Guidance for places of worship which can be viewed [here](#).

New Church of England Guidance

The Church of England website has been updated to reflect the new guidance and can be seen [here](#).

Singing and Choirs

Sadly, congregational singing indoors remains prohibited. Moreover the new Government guidance restricts amateur choirs to **six** singers. There are clear and well-publicised discrepancies in this advice and clarity is being sought in a range of different ways. We will pass on any clarifications as soon as possible.

Worshipping Outdoors

Again, the guidance here is hard to understand but it remains the case that congregational singing is allowed outdoors. People should remain in groups of 30 but it is permissible for more than one of those groups to be part of the same act of worship.

Small Groups

There is no clear advice for small group meetings and this is an area where judgement and discretion will need to be exercised. Some churches are starting and finishing with worship and then splitting people into distinct groups of six for the teaching element. House groups held in people's homes should be no more than six in size if they are meeting face to face.

PCCs

PCCs have always been able to meet physically but our advice has been to avoid this where possible. Again it will need local decision to determine when it is right to return to in person meetings. Local conditions such as the prevalence of Indian variant should be taken into consideration here.

Thy Kingdom Come

Our daily services continue this week as follows:

- Thursday 20 May - Christ Church Thornton, led by the Revd Damian Platt, [link](#)
- Friday 21 May - St Luke's Brierfield, St Cuthbert's Burnley, led by the Revd Munawar Din, [link](#)
- Saturday 22 May - St James' Chorley, led by the Revd David Philips, [link](#)

Pentecost Sunday 23rd May:

Blackburn Cathedral will be hosting our Diocesan Pentecost service at 4pm with Bishops Julian, Philip and Jill. Significantly this marks the *Unlock* launch of the next phase of our Vision 2026. You may still be able to book a space to attend this service in person by clicking [here](#), with booking open until 4pm on Friday 21 May. Alternatively, you can join the live feed using this [link](#).

Unlock – Lament, Thanksgiving and Mission

As we start to unlock church life, we are sharing stories from across the Diocese of ways different parishes have started to engage with **lament, thanksgiving and mission**.

This week we hear two stories under the theme of thanksgiving. The first is an initiative from Churches Together in Clitheroe to thank Key Workers, described the Revd Andy Froud:

In the run up to Easter 2021 Clitheroe Christians in Partnership put together hampers which were shared with key workers who have worked through the pandemic across the Clitheroe area. The hampers contained, including biscuits, cakes and other luxury gift items.

"It's gone so well and the responses from schools, doctors, care homes have been incredible." said Chris Meyer, who worships at Clitheroe Community Church. "We have received some lovely responses for the hampers and the prayers."

From the first lockdown in March 2020 Mrs Rosemary Lowry, a member of St Helen's Waddington Church has been hard at work baking cakes for key workers. Each week for over a year an array of muffins, brownies and other cakes have been distributed to care home workers, nurses, vaccine stewards, school staff and school crossing patrol workers. "I

have occasionally tried them (for quality control purposes only)" said Revd Andy Froud "and I can vouch for their excellence. However my offer to care home workers and the nurses at Clitheroe Hospital to do a Joe Wicks style workout to burn them off has so far fallen on deaf ears"

The second comes from the Revd Adam Thomas, Warden of Whalley Abbey:

The first residential retreat at Whalley Abbey in 14 months would normally be thanksgiving enough! The beautiful routine of input, reflection, prayer and worship, meals and fellowship - with the Abbey ruins once again echoing in song, have helped not just those on retreat, but also so many visiting the grounds each day. The focus on abiding in John's Gospel has been the perfect opportunity to explore the difference between being in our homes and being home. Retreat is so poor a word for what takes place. Refresh is much nearer the mark.

This refreshing is what has lead us to write about the sense of thanksgiving as more and more of you, our beloved colleagues, are coming to be refreshed here at Whalley Abbey. You are coming for spiritual direction. You are coming on our guided day and stay retreats. You are coming on the clergy study day. You are coming for a few days of your own private refreshing. You are coming with your church, colleagues, friends and family. You are coming for look, a chance to walk in the grounds, to pray in the chapel, to be re-charged by the encounter with God that centuries of prayer and worship appear to make more tangible here. We are thankful for a donated bursary for up 100% of the costs of your refreshing here, if you need it. Let us thank you for all that you have been doing in the past 14 months, for all that you have been wrestling with, for the weight, the anxiety, and the load that you have been carrying, by offering God's loving hospitality and refreshment here at Whalley Abbey. If you would like refreshing contact us at: adam.thomas@whalleyabbey.org.

Coronavirus Email Address

If you have questions or problems and can't find answers on the [advice compendium](#) please email: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org.

**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,

Coronavirus Task Group