

Dear Friends,

In this extended briefing we carry some advice and information written by the two medical advisers to the Task Group on some issues to consider as we move towards Stage 4 of the roadmap out of lockdown. Whilst some of it is necessarily speculative as we do not know when Stage 4 will begin or what it will entail, we hope that this advice enables parishes to plan ahead and do some thinking about what might be required next.

New Local Guidelines

Confusion reigned on Tuesday when residents of two of our Boroughs - Blackburn with Darwen and Burnley – were given new Government guidance advising against travelling out of the area. It was later clarified to read that travel should be kept to a minimum.

Increasingly Government will be trying to work by informing people's decisions rather than issuing directives and we need to see this new guidance in that light. Please continue to keep track of infection rates in your area and make informed decisions accordingly.

Online Worship this Sunday

An Act of Worship from Blackburn Cathedral will be available every Sunday from 9am. You can view this on the [Cathedral YouTube Channel](#) or on [Facebook](#).

A Church Near You also enables people to find a livestreamed service in a local church. Just use [this link](#) and enter a postcode.

Farewell to Liturgy at Home

Our grateful thanks to Fr Neil Kelley who has been producing our weekly Liturgy at Home resource since March last year, a heroic effort which has been much appreciated. But all good things come to an end!

A Resource for Urban Churches – and for others too!

Unlock-Urban is a small charity that supports urban churches and they have produced an excellent resource called 'The Year we Stayed at Home' to help parishes emerge from lockdown. Whilst designed for urban churches, it will have much wider use and is free of charge. Follow [this link](#) to see more.

Issues to Consider around Public Worship when Step 4 on the Roadmap is Triggered.

Introduction

As we continue along the Government's roadmap out of lockdown, we hope for more opportunities to re-introduce many aspects of our church life that have been sorely missed. It is an exciting prospect to spend more time and energy on what we *can* do than what we can't. We do not know precisely what step 4 in the roadmap will entail for churches. However, this guidance seeks to highlight what we foresee as likely scenarios and is designed to help us think through *how* we can do things well as these new opportunities arise. In particular, the next step is likely to involve specific challenges for church leaders, including:

- The responsibility for making safe and sensible decisions is increasingly likely to be delegated away from central Government and towards local leaders and institutions, thus affording local parishes much greater freedom and responsibility
- There will be a variety of responses within our communities to these new opportunities ranging from enthusiasm to fear. We need to think through how we can love and care for one another at our different stages.
- Just as lack of physical exercise causes muscles to atrophy, it is inevitable that many church members will be suffering from ministry or spiritual atrophy after such a long period of inactivity in certain areas of church life. How can we help one another build up our 'ministry fitness' – the spiritual equivalent of a 'couch to 5k'?
- Societal attitudes towards personal space, hygiene, touch, etc. have shifted significantly over the past year and we must therefore consider how to adapt our mission and ministry in this context.

Background

Covid-19 is a rapidly changing virus that infects the mucous membranes of the respiratory tract. It is spread by ingesting or breathing in droplets containing active viral particles.

Managing the spread of infection is about managing the risk of infection. It is not possible to prevent someone getting an infection if they are exposed to enough active viral particles. Risk of infection is reduced by:

- Reducing the amount of virus in the community by limiting its spread by minimising contact between those with infection and those who are free of infection. That includes the guidance of hands, face and space.
- Increasing the immunity of the population through vaccination
- Preventing severe disease and death by protecting those most vulnerable.
- Monitoring the emergence of new variants and responding quickly to those that are more infectious or able to cause potential life-threatening infections.

There remains considerable uncertainty about both the way Covid-19 is most often transmitted and how infectious it is. This uncertainty will remain as new variants emerge such as the variant that was first identified in India which is currently the main variant causing infections across parts of the Diocese including Blackburn and Burnley. The emergent of new variants of the virus means that guidance may need to change, sometimes at short notice.

Step 4 (Possibly June 21)

When we move to Step 4 of the roadmap out of lockdown the Government hopes to be able to remove all legal limits on social contact. However, depending on the results of the Events Research Programme, some *guidance* and *recommendations* around testing and infection risk-reduction are likely to remain in place for several months. The exact nature of the guidance will only emerge as results from research are analysed but will likely be around handwashing, minimising high risk activities such as hugging and singing, rigorous cleaning regimes and good ventilation.

It seems likely that each parish will be responsible for carrying out their own risk assessment and implementing appropriate measures relevant to their own context for managing risk. Any activity that involves people gathering will expose those participating to the *potential* of

infection. Being indoors, and in close proximity to others is riskier than being outdoors, socially distanced. Therefore, a balance will need to be struck between those activities that are essential for the life of your church, in your context with the risk those activities pose to your congregation and the wider community. You and the leadership team for your church are best placed to make the best judgement about what is reasonable and safe based on your context (eg. infection rates/variants in your area, demographics and vaccination status, resources available, etc.).

Next steps around public worship

Step 4 of the roadmap will hopefully allow for the reintroduction of many of the elements of worship we have so desperately missed. Here are some things to think about – both general and specific:

Lament – Many people will be anxious about some the reintroduction of some elements of worship. When someone experiences a “first” after a time of deprivation (of someone or something) it can be experienced as a new loss in itself. Care and space needs to be given to acknowledge the challenge of restarting some activities after such a long absence. It is important to prepare for counterintuitive and surprising responses.

Thanksgiving – Being able to return to unrestricted worship should be celebrated. How will these moments be marked with thanksgiving and rejoicing whilst recognising those who are struggling?

Mission – All of our mission and ministry is contextualised. Societal attitudes to personal space, hygiene, appropriate physical touch, etc. have shifted (sometimes dramatically) because of the pandemic. How should we appropriately re-contextualise our mission and ministry in this new cultural setting?

Track and Trace

There is likely to be a recommendation for continuing to track and test by recording attendees.

Social Distancing indoors.

It is likely that the Government will continue to advise avoiding overcrowding indoors. There are unlikely to be specific requirements such as 1m plus, however returning to a full church all in one go may be overwhelming for some people. Consider gradually phasing the reduction of social distancing. Are there aspects of people flow management that would actually be helpful to retain – eg. one way systems?

Wearing face coverings.

It is not clear whether the wearing of face coverings indoors in public buildings such as churches and concert halls will be encouraged in step 4 and beyond.

Sharing the peace

People will have different levels of comfort and thresholds of risk regarding physical touch. How will those who do not want to shake hands or be hugged be enabled to opt out with

integrity. Consider whether it is appropriate, in some settings, to substitute a handshake for a fist or elbow bump.

Reintroducing the chalice

We are awaiting guidance from the national church about the reintroduction of the chalice. This will be complicated pastorally and liturgically for many. How will those who do not feel comfortable receiving the chalice be accommodated? Equally, it is likely that there will be a need for more stringent hygiene procedures around administering the chalice. It is possible that communicants may need to sanitize their hands before and after receiving the elements. If that is the case how would that work in your context?

Congregational singing indoors

It is unclear when singing will be permitted. When it is allowed, some may be very anxious. It may be worth considering phasing in the amount of singing in a service and possibly having more said services for those who are anxious initially. It may be that using face coverings when singing may be recommended. How will that be managed in your context?

Wellbeing

This next phase, which demands such local levels of discernment, responsibility and monitoring is stressful. Think about how you will look after yourself and the wider leadership team. It is important to ensure you have regular breaks, that you have back up plans in place in case you fall ill. Think about continuing or refreshing the clergy clusters you were part of in the first wave of the pandemic to provide support, cover as well as a safe place to share ideas and frustrations in a constructive way.

Unlock – Lament, Thanksgiving and Mission

Each week we are sharing stories from across the Diocese of ways different parishes have started to engage with **lament, thanksgiving and mission**.

This week's story is from our Cathedral with Canon Rowena Pailing describing plans for a Back to Church Sunday in September:

How can we do back to church, when we've never been away?!

The ministry of the Cathedral has not stopped at any point because of Covid. Like all churches across the country, there have been moments when face to face worship has not been permitted, but whenever it has been possible we have gathered in a Covid secure way, and when it hasn't, we have worshipped together on line, in a format which continues. And whether face to face or on line, we pray for our Diocese, its parishes, chaplaincies and other Christian communities at least twice every day.

Over the last few weeks it has been a joy to welcome back many who have returned to services in the building, though we recognise that there are some people whose confidence has been knocked by the pandemic, and others who may always find online worship more accessible. Many have missed singing, and simply being together, so that will be our focus.

As the Dean, the Very Revd Peter Howell-Jones, explained at the Diocesan Pentecost service, what we are doing is quite simple, so if it works in your context, give it a go!

First, we are planning events to thank and celebrate our adult volunteers, and to encourage the parents and carers of the many children who are a key part of our worshipping and musical life.

Then September will be a month of opportunities to invite and encourage people to come 'Back to Church'. [We will be dedicating time to be together for each of our regular Sunday congregations with a brunch after the 9am service and refreshments after Evensong on 12 September, and a lunch after the 10.30am service on 19 September.](#) Our worship will engage with the themes of lament, thanksgiving and mission.

September will also see the launch of a new Christian basics course and another regular study group in addition to the existing house groups and study groups which already meet in person and online. And we have plans for more musical events, hoping that by September it will be possible to have congregational singing once again.

We may never have been away, but it's always good to celebrate being together.

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