

The Bishop of Blackburn
The Rt Revd Julian T Henderson

6th March 2020

Dear all clergy

Thank you for all that you are doing as we all try to navigate through this tense time in our country. Making sure that we are suitably and thoroughly prepared is vital but doing so without allowing fear to take hold in our parishes is also important.

As the national response to the Coronavirus has entered a new stage, we too must review our practices. It is very likely that formal advice will soon change for those parishes who are aware of an outbreak in their local area. In these instances, the recommendation will be twofold:

- To avoid shaking hands during the peace and
- To make the Common Cup available on request only, i.e. not offer it and only give it if specifically asked for.

I have heard of a number of alternatives to shaking hands are already being used across the diocese. Using British Sign Language is one, simple option and there are a number of tutorials online which show how it is done.

I would like to repeat my previous advice that intinction is not considered a safer option in this regard and that national advice has consistently discouraged this in the strongest possible terms; not least because it can lead to serious health problems for those who have intolerances such as celiac disease.

Some may want to adopt this advice now, regardless of whether there has been a local outbreak or not and I understand that. Some will not feel that their local circumstances yet warrants this action. The important thing is that good hygiene continues to be encouraged and modelled, particularly around the distribution of Communion, and that congregants feel comfortable in opting out of anything that gives them cause for concern.

The senior team continue to be on hand should you need any help or advice, and you are all in my prayers regularly.

As ever

