

Dear Friends

These are difficult days for our nation, and many of us are still coming to terms with the shock of suspending worship and the curtailing of our normal life. Gathering in community is integral to the Christian life and living without that will be a deep cause of grief, something we need to acknowledge and lament.

At the same time, it is so impressive to see what churches are doing and the imagination that is being demonstrated as people open churches, serve their communities and make creative use of technology. Thank you for your faithfulness and creativity in hard times. It would be lovely to hear news of how ministry is changing in these strange days, so please get in touch if you have something to share.

Today we have updates and advice on the following areas:

- Important update on worship
- Updated advice on baptisms and weddings
- Livestream Worship, prayer and communications updates
- Advice on schools
- Community Ministry

There will very soon be updates in keeping your church open for private prayer and parishes finances.

Please also continue to 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.***

We are starting the process of ringing round clergy, but because of the scale of the task this will initially focus on incumbents and churchwardens of parishes in vacancy. Matt Allen has already made contact with curates.

Important Update on Worship

Following the recent Archbishops letter and in accord with the excellent example of our own Cathedral (see below), we need to be much clearer about patterns of worship in our parishes. We are now advising that you adopt the following pattern:

- In the morning the priest should offer prayer and (if he or she so wishes) celebrate the Eucharist **but with the building locked** so that the gathering does not become too large. It would be appropriate for one or two close colleagues or parishioners to be present but no more than that.
- After prayer has been offered try to think how the building can be left **open** for as much of the rest of the day as possible.
- Towards the end of the day, the priest may offer prayer again but with very small numbers (less than 5 ideally) and in a locked building with all present practicing social distancing and good hand hygiene.

A huge range of resources is appearing to help people to maintain a life of worship and prayer in their own homes, and some of this can be found on the Coronavirus section of the Diocesan website.

Churches should be left open wherever possible and for as long as possible (indeed the longer the period of opening the less the risk of significant numbers gathering). Detailed guidance on church opening will be circulated tomorrow.

Whilst there is great sadness in having to retain such restrictive patterns of prayer, I hope that you will see the sense in them and be able to act accordingly.

Your Cathedral is Praying for You

Canon Rowena Pailing writes: The Cathedral is open daily 10am-4pm for personal prayer. We are also maintaining our daily offering of prayer and worship, and whilst this is not open to the public, it means that every day we are praying for the parishes and chaplaincies in our Diocese, and for the communities they serve. Services will be live-streamed, and the YouTube videos can be accessed from our website. We are providing weekly resources for worship at home and also for parents/carers to use with children. These can be accessed by signing up at the bottom of our website homepage. We are also a Foodbank collection hub, and donations can be brought in whenever the building is open.

For more details, see <https://blackburncathedral.com/church-is-changing/>

Updated Advice on Weddings and Baptisms

There is new advice on these occasional offices in the FAQ section of the Church of England Website. Please have a look here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

A number of questions have arisen about this because of apparent contradictions in the advice about the numbers who might attend. This number should be kept as low as possible and should certainly be in **single figures**. Appropriate social distancing should be observed and we would suggest postponing baptisms where possible.

We realise that many of you are having extremely difficult pastoral conversations at the moment and you are greatly in our prayers. Email coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org if you need support.

Livestream Worship on Sunday with Bishop Jill

As churches across the Diocese use technology for prayer and worship more, a special livestream service led by Bishop Jill, '**9am Live from the Diocese of Blackburn**', taking place at St James' in Clitheroe, is online this Sunday. Watch the livestream on St James' YouTube [channel here](#), but if there are problems with technology, don't be concerned as a recording will be added soon after broadcast to the [Diocesan YouTube channel here](#).

The See Magazine

We have taken the difficult decision to suspend publication of The See diocesan magazine due to the logistical difficulties of delivery and circulation of the magazine in the current situation. This includes the April edition which was due to be delivered shortly. Parishes will not be expected to pay for the April edition. A condensed pdf version of the April edition will be available for download and printing locally shortly [on this page of our website](#).

Prayer Resources

A large number of Coronavirus liturgy and prayer resources [are available here for download](#), including prayers for use with children. More on the Diocesan board of Education [website here](#). In addition, courtesy of St Laurence's Church in Chorley, we have an Order of Service for prayer and worship at home. The first one [is here](#).

Day of Prayer

Please remember that the Archbishops have called us to a national Day of Prayer on Sunday. The resources are here:

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

Schools

Schools will close today and we are very aware of the intense demands that this will place on clergy and lay leaders who have school-aged children.

It was announced today that clergy are keyworkers under the government guidelines and this means that clergy can technically send their children to their local school. Your particular circumstances or heightened pastoral demands in the community may make it necessary for some of you to take up this opportunity.

However schools are under huge pressure in making sense of and implementing the guidance they have been given and the government is clear that, if you can keep your children safely at home, then you should do so.

It would be good to send supportive emails or letters and offer prayer support to local schools. Some may appreciate more hands-on pastoral support, but please remember other pressures you may be under before committing too much of your time.

Guidelines on Community Ministry

"Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" Isaiah 1:17

Serving the community is one of the core parts of ministry. But how we provide such ministry must change, at least on a temporary basis, during the COVID-19 pandemic in order that we can protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Consider carefully all community ministries your church is involved with and ask if they are essential to the community you serve. The answer will be different in different places.

If you decide that the ministry is providing an essential service and there would be considerable harm if it stopped then you must take action to mitigate the risk of spreading COVID-19. This should include:

- Seek and follow the advice of health officials, public health experts and other bigger organisations providing similar ministries.
- Ensure all your volunteers and paid staff are fit, should not be self-isolating and are aware of the risks they are being exposed to as well as the risk they may expose others to by providing their services.
- Thinking about different ways to provide the ministry that reduces face to face interaction such as delivering food parcels to individual doorsteps or using pre-packaged food that people can collect for themselves.
- Take immediate action to avoid groups of more than 6 people gathering. For example, you may need to stagger people coming to collect food, reducing the number of volunteers working to the minimum that can safely deliver the service, whilst maintaining appropriate distance between them.
- Exploring options around working with other charities or organisations that are providing a similar service in order to provide a safe and sustainable service during the pandemic

Please consider the following:

- Contact your local foodbank and ask them how they want your support. As it will no longer be possible to collect donated food at church services ask them how best members of congregations can support them and publicise that as widely as you can via social media. You can also make donations [of money here](#).
- Supporting the work of the parish council, schools, where they remain open, and other organisations with your prayers.

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>

***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