

Dear Friends,

Tomorrow will be very strange for us all. Usually on the Lords' day it is our duty and our joy to come together to offer praise. But our public worship is now shut-down and we will be dispersed.

Amidst the wonderful air of positivity that many church leaders are bringing to this situation, let's make space to remember the abnormality of these times, to name our grief and to lament. And let's remember also that it was from the shut-down emptiness of the tomb that God performed his saving work in Christ.

Nationally we have seen extraordinary developments over the past 24 hours with pubs and restaurants closed and the Chancellor writing a blank cheque to keep workers secure. In these strange times, let us pray fervently for our nation at this time of crisis.

A short briefing today which includes:

- New Guidance in three areas from the Church of England
- Guidance on open churches
- Latest on prayer and worship resources

New Guidance from the Church of England

Please note that the Church of England website has been updated under the following three areas:

1. A downloadable document which gives guidance on Spiritual Communion.
2. Downloadable guidance on Mental Health and Wellbeing and Coronavirus, aimed at helping ministers and others who are offering pastoral support.
3. New guidance covering key workers and whether Church staff are covered.

This can all be found under [Coronoavirus guidance for churches](#) (The link works despite the spelling. At least our English is holding up in the Diocese of Blackburn!)

Guidance for Keeping Church Open

The church is the people, not the building, so the best way to keep the church open is to encourage your people to pray at home and serve the vulnerable and lonely. That's a church that can never close!

In terms of church buildings, we are currently encouraged by the Archbishops to keep these open as much as possible (though this advice may change so please keep up to date with latest guidance).

Many might worry about insurance implications, but EIG encourage church opening and it will not void your policy. Some churches may feel nervous about theft, but we need to ask ourselves what matters more, a piece of furniture or allowing the people we serve a place to pray at a time of crisis?

So, church opening is encouraged but must be done safely and in a way that respects the need for appropriate distancing.

- The longer the church can be open, the less likely it is that the significant numbers will gather at one time. Try to keep your church open for at least four hours a day.
- Have some alcohol-based hand gel available at the door for people to use, with a notice asking them to do so on entering and leaving.
- If your church is chaired, remove as many chairs as you can and place the remaining ones at least two meters apart. If you have pews, consider having a notice asking people to sit at least two metres away from each other.
- Fear of theft should not deter you. Given that it is likely to be some time before we can worship publicly again, make the church secure by locking away anything that might be stolen such as candlesticks, electronic equipment or precious items.
- You may wish to ask someone to be in attendance in the church when it is open but only if it is felt to be essential and the person is fit and well.
- You need to ask if it is safe for one person to be in church alone. If there are two it is vital that they keep safe distance from each other.
- They should not be in a high-risk category.
- They must keep safe distance from any visitors.
- Such volunteers should have a mobile phone with them and know whom to call.
- They should wash their hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds on entering the church, every hour whilst in the building and on leaving the church.
- Another person should know they are there.

- They should have an escape route available other than the main door.
- Surfaces that many people will touch, such as door handles and pew tops, should be wiped down regularly.
- It is good practice to carry out a risk assessment.
- Before opening you should conduct a safety audit to ensure that the church is as tidy as possible, that kitchen areas are secure and that there is no unnecessary equipment or apparatus lying around. There is danger in any object that several hands may touch.
- If you wish to have stations or images to aid people in prayer, make sure they are non-tactile and will not attract groups to gather in one place.
- Any books or pamphlets that are kept in church should be stored out of the way.
- You may feel it appropriate from time to time to offer prayer aloud. If so this should be spontaneous and not advertised. We should avoid any activities or events that cause people to gather together.

Daily briefings online

This Daily Briefing from the Coronavirus Task Group is also added to the dedicated website area on the [Diocesan website](#). This area will be streamlined next week, with a simpler 'landing page' and clearly marked sections to make finding the information you need as straightforward as possible.

National Day of Prayer and '9am Live from the Diocese of Blackburn'

Don't forget the Day of Prayer tomorrow. Bishop Jill encourages our participation in a [new video](#). Meanwhile, coronavirus liturgy and prayer resources are [here for download](#), including prayers for use with children. More for children on the Diocesan Board of Education [website](#). Courtesy of St Laurence's Church in Chorley we also have an Order of Service for prayer and worship at home this Sunday and every Sunday from now on. The first one [is here](#).

Bishop Jill will be livestreaming worship tomorrow morning at 9am. 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](#). Services are also being streamed from and Blackburn Cathedral (blackburncathedral.com) and Preston Minister (prestonminster.org)

Finally... any question or queries or to report self-isolation, 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 the nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.***

Yours,

Bishop Philip and the Coronavirus Task Group