



**THE
DIOCESE
OF
BLACKBURN**
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN LANCASHIRE

The Bishop of Blackburn

The Rt Revd Iulian T Henderson

Dear Friends,

The God we meet in worship is always faithful. Worship is the heart and centre of our lives for there we meet and offer our lives to God who always keep his promises and who, even in the valley of the shadow of death, walks at our side.

We are living in extreme times in our national life and coping with a global emergency as we seek to contain and control the Coronavirus and, as the Prime Minister laid out yesterday, this will entail making extreme changes to our way of life. However, because of God's goodness, we can see these changes not as a set of problems to be solved, but as new opportunities to worship and serve the God whose love never fails.

Please find attached the most recent correspondence from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. You will notice that it is not a letter about how we are to simply shut everything down but is instead about how we are to carry on as the Church of God in these testing times; it is about a different way of continuing and I commend it as such.

It will inform you that public worship services are to cease as part of the Government's advice, and I ask you to implement this with immediate effect. It will also ask you to maintain a daily pattern of morning and evening prayer in your churches. And very importantly it will invite you to keep church buildings open as a sign that we are here to serve and to proclaim the living God.

Our way of gathering may need to change for a season and that is right because it is done with the most vulnerable in mind. But this should not force us into a season of inaction, quite the opposite. My advice to you is to move instead into a season of prayer and of service. This is not a time to withdraw from society, but to be obedient to those who have been given rule over us, practice impeccable personal hygiene and most of all lead the way in prayer and in service; remembering always the most in need in our communities.

There are a number of people in our communities who rely on the church for their physical needs as well as their spiritual growth. Abandoning them at this time would be a dereliction of duty and I therefore ask you to look at your communities, identify the most vulnerable and isolated, and consider how you can safely and effectively continue to serve them. Food banks, financial support service, clothing exchanges – these sorts of enterprises have my full support to continue, making changes to ensure best practice along with government guidelines.

I know that you will have more, specific questions and the Task Group chaired by the Bishop of Burnley will be meeting daily to consider these. It will be impractical to offer advice on every contingency in one communication as it would simply be too much in information to absorb, so for the time being daily updates will be sent which will address issues of concern. To assist them in doing this a new email address has been set up which I ask you to use if you have any questions. The address is coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org

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For emergencies please either call my office on 01254 248234 or Bishop Philip on 07919180788 or Archdeacon David on 07493299677.

I will pray for you all daily, and your wellbeing at a time such as this is upmost in my mind. Please in the midst of all this, ensure that you care for yourselves and your own spiritual and physical wellbeing. I want you to know that I am walking with you every step of the way as we find out together what it looks like to both 'do' and 'be' church at this time. Please be patient with the Task Group, with the senior clergy and with yourselves as we continue to work for the Glory of God and the good of His people.

As ever

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julian". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.