

Dear Friends,

This briefing is to ensure that church leaders have heard and responded to the news that the whole of Lancashire is to be placed in Tier 4 from one minute after midnight on December 31st.

This is dispiriting news especially since Lancashire has been under the tightest restrictions nationally for most of this pandemic. It may be especially hard for those of you in parts of the county where infection rates are low as there are huge variations across the region.

But it is clear the new strain is placing huge pressure on hospitals and it is important that we set a lead in responding speedily to these new restrictions.

Whilst the news of the new vaccines is very encouraging there will be some tough weeks/months ahead for our nation, especially for those who work in the NHS, social care and in our schools, colleges and universities. Please keep praying.

### **Implications of Tier 4 for Churches**

There is an [excellent and admirably clear document here](#) which describes the implications for churches of all four tiers. **Please have a really good look at it.** The main headlines are:

- **Public worship can continue** but please be assiduous (as you already are) in adhering closely to the spirit and the letter of the guidance.
- **Meetings such as PCCs cannot now take place in person** and so **MUST** be carried out by on an online conferencing platform such as Zoom.
- **Likewise house-groups etc cannot take place physically.** There are to be no physical meetings other than for worship.
- **Weddings may only go ahead in exceptional circumstances** and attendance is now restricted to **six** people (please note the C of E guidance requires updating in this area).
- **Baptisms may go ahead** under the same restrictions as any other act of public worship.
- **Funerals may go ahead** with attendance restricted to 30 people
- **Pastoral visiting may continue** as it constitutes work and clergy are designated as key workers in this regard. However, only visit in person where pastoral circumstances means that there really is no alternative.

### **And More Generally in Tier 4...**

- Residents should stay at home, unless they have a 'reasonable excuse' such as work, education, outdoor exercise and purchasing essential goods
- All non-essential shops, hairdressers, nail bars and indoor entertainment venues must close
- Gyms and indoor swimming pools, indoor sports courts and dance studios must close
- You cannot meet other people indoors or in your garden, unless you live with them or they are part of your support bubble. You can meet with one person not in your household or support bubble in a public space for exercise.

- People should not leave tier four areas or travel abroad, except for limited reasons (including work and education)

### **Bishop Julian's New Year Message**

Look out for Bishop Julian's New Year message - it will be [live here](#) from midday tomorrow (December 31) and you will also see it in local and regional media in the coming days. The message is also scheduled to appear on BBC Radio Lancashire this Sunday - listen [here live](#) between 6am and 10am or after on [BBC Sounds here](#).

### **Sunday service for January 3**

The first online service of 2021 on the [Diocesan YouTube channel](#) will be another of our multilingual services, again led by the Revd Sarah Gill and with the Revd Nick McKee preaching.

### **Coronavirus Email Address**

We'll be monitoring the email address throughout Christmas and New Year. [coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org](mailto:coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org). It is important that clergy who are self-isolating send us a note to this address.

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
whose years never fail  
and whose mercies are new each returning day:  
let the radiance of your Spirit renew our lives,  
warming our hearts and giving light to our minds;  
that we may pass the coming year  
in joyful obedience and firm faith;  
through him who is the beginning and the end,  
your Son, Christ our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**