

Dear Friends,

We need to start today's briefing with a very important letter from Bishop Julian:

Dear Friends in Christ,

Thank you so much for all you are doing to maintain the life of the church and witness to Jesus Christ in these unprecedented times. No-one could have foreseen that such a serious lock down would be called for, even just a few weeks ago. But the seriousness of this crisis is now hitting home to most, though sadly not all, and we are advised that we are on the cusp of a major surge in identified cases of Covid 19. Unless we take good and wise precautions, but sadly even if we do, there is likely to be an increase in hospital admissions, to a level which will overwhelm our remarkable NHS and its workforce.

In addition to services of public worship being suspended, the advice now is that church buildings should be shut to the public for prayer. A statement will be issued by the national church to this effect later today and we expect advice on occasional offices also and this will be communicated to you as soon as possible; sadly I had not received it at time of sending this update. One of the problems of allowing people in to a church building to pray is that they touch door handles, prayer books, pews and chairs and so the virus gets transmitted. This is obviously a very hard decision to reach and then communicate, but my hope is that you and congregations around the diocese will understand and ensure compliance to this guidance.

Those churches who provide food or other essential services to their immediate communities will need to consider how this can be done safely. Please take seriously that this should not be taken as an opportunity for churches to open if they offer a warm seat and a cup of tea; as welcome as these things can be, and is only for those parts of church who make significant contribution to the physical wellness of the community.

The implications of all the governments policies are far reaching and not surprisingly we have no idea of ultimate timescales. For many isolation from family, friends, work colleagues, children at school and neighbours comes at a significant cost and we must do all we can to ensure good support by means other than meeting one another. That is especially true if the current advice on distancing remains in place for quite some while.

One example of how seriously the situation is being taken by the Church of England is that the gathering of Anglican Communion Bishops from all around the world, only meeting roughly every ten years and due to meet this summer, has now been postponed to 2021. While a call to stop meeting together as Christians is against the instruction in the Scriptures, we need to reassure one another that church, the spiritual life of God's people, is not stopped or bound by the closure of buildings. The life of the risen Christ among His people by the presence of His Spirit has not changed and we are called to live out that life in our homes and neighbourhoods and places of work, if they are still operating. Maybe this period of lock down will be a moment for the break out of new blessing from God, as we learn what it means to be His People once again.

In the space and time now made available to us by the lock down and especially as we prepare to mark the events of Holy Week and Easter apart from one another, may there be a new seeking after Jesus in prayer and His will for our lives and our discipleship. Why not give attention to 'knowing the Scriptures better', the challenge I issued last year? And in your intercessions pray for the spread of the virus to stop. God can intervene. Pray for healing and restoration for those with the virus and receiving treatment. Pray for resilience and strength and protection for all medical staff working in the NHS, especially those who have retired and are being invited back to work. Pray for the many who are anxious and fearful of whatever age to know the peace of Christ. Pray for those who have been bereaved and particularly where they have not been able to be with a loved one in their final hours, for comfort and good support.

I am very grateful for the daily zoom meetings of the Coronavirus Task Group and their briefings to keep us all up to speed in a very fast moving set of troubling

circumstances. May we look back upon this time as one in which we have been open to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches and been prepared to obey His call

Bishop Julian

Bishop of Blackburn

Tomorrow we will be sending out advice on maintaining the church building during this period of closure. Please note that the advice distributed on Saturday regarding open churches should be disregarded.

There will soon be new advice on occasional offices in light of this change so please watch this space.

Developments nationally continue to move with alarming speed. It is critical that, as Christians we are modelling good citizenship at this time and are hearing and acting on national advice, especially around unnecessary travel, social distancing and the washing of hands. Be aware of the two metre rule, especially when livestreaming services.

From today 1.5 million people will be restricted to their homes, many of whom will be members of our congregations. It is vital to stay in touch with such people in a safe way such as by telephone, and to ensure that they have resources to maintain their Christian discipleship. In due course we will see how Christians can play a part in the Hubs the government intends to set up for their support.

We have now rung round almost all incumbents and our overwhelming impression is one of immense gratitude for all that you are doing to meet needs, maintain the life of the church and adapt to fast-changing circumstances. Thank you so much for this.

We also need to give some thought to the contingency that a number of our clergy will be off work with sickness at any one time. Below you will find advice which asks clergy to form clusters with neighbouring parishes and inform the Area Dean of the names of those in your cluster.

Today's briefing today includes:

- Advice and Contingency Planning for Clergy and their Households
- Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) Resilience

Advice and Contingency Planning for Clergy and their Households

COVID-19 will infect a significant percentage of the population, (possibly up to 80%), over the next few weeks and months. This briefing paper outlines the reasons behind the measures taken by the government and the plans you need to make as the pandemic runs its course.

The measures being taken by the government are to slow, as far as possible, the rate of spread so that those initially infected are starting to recover as others start to fall ill. This will allow the NHS to have the capacity to continue to care for those who need intensive care, (around 20% of those infected), whilst enabling other key services to continue to run. Without social distancing and self-isolation, there is a significant risk that the number of people infected by COVID-19 at the same time will overwhelm the NHS and leave essential services with no staff.

Self-isolation and social distancing protect others as much as they protect you and your household. The current evidence indicates that the lag time between being infected and showing symptoms can be up to 12 days, during which time it is possible to pass on the virus through physical contact, droplets from coughing or to a lesser extent through unintentionally leaving viral particles on surfaces such as door handles and the like. Washing hands well with warm water and soap for 20 seconds and wiping down

surfaces with an antibacterial product are highly effective at killing the viral particles which is why the government is telling us all to wash our hands and practice good hygiene. Whilst we still do not know exactly how infectious the virus (i.e. how many viral particles are needed to establish the infection in each person) is, it is vital that we do not take any unnecessary risks. Remember every risk you take exposes others unintentionally to risk too.

Plan for the worst hope for the best

Looking after yourself and your household

Do not take unnecessary risks with your own health or the health of those in your household. Think carefully about the risk you may expose yourself to in undertaking face to face meetings with people. Is it essential you meet? or could you provide support or discuss the issue by phone, email or virtually using zoom or skype? If you do assess a face to face meeting as essential and unavoidable then follow the guidance provided – do not be tempted to cut corners even if you feel uncomfortable, for example asking to wash your hands etc.

If you fall ill or know you have been in contact with a potential case of COVID-19 please follow NHS guidance around self-isolating and contact NHS 111. Do not go to your GP surgery or hospital unless life is endangered when you must dial 999 and follow the advice of the emergency services. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Think about your household

If you make plans whilst well it will make it much easier if you fall ill.

Whether you live with others or are on your own, what plans have you in place to inform people and get the help you need? For example, who will walk the dog, get provisions for you, pick up prescriptions etc?

- Think about an average week and consider if there are there specific issues that people may need to know about such as allergies, mobility issues that may impact on the help needed.
- If you live on your own think of a number of local people who you might be able to help you beyond the churchwardens and the congregation.
- Do you have a reasonable supply of basic household provisions including paracetamol to keep you going for a few days if you need to self-isolate. For example, how will you get bread and milk, pay for shopping, get cash if needed etc?
- Are there key bills that need to be paid on a regular basis – how will they get paid if you are not able to go online, sign a cheque go to a cashpoint?
- Do you have a reasonable supply of your prescription medications? – do not wait until the last minute to get a repeat prescription. Does someone in the household know how to get a repeat prescription for you?
- Do people know that they must inform the Diocese via the coronavirus specific email if they are self-isolating, stating the start date? coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org

Think about what you need to stay well when social distancing, particularly if you live on your own:

- Establish a new daily routine – life will not be the same for several weeks.
- Balance your weekly routine and have a good mix of ministry activities (prayer, phone calls, reading etc) relaxation and rest
- Think about which regular activities are most important to you and think of ways you can do them at home or remotely. For example, if you enjoy seeing people socially set up regular online meetings with good friends that happen at the time you would normally socialise. If it is not possible then think of other activities that will feed your spirit.

- Set daily goals that can provide you with a sense of purpose and achievement. Be realistic but see this time as an opportunity to do things you might not do otherwise.
- Identify the triggers that make you feel low and look for ways to manage them.
- Talk with family, friends, neighbours and those you trust about what will help you stay well and positive. Ask them to tell you if they are getting worried about you and agree what steps you will take if needed.
- Take care of yourself. Exercise. Eat and drink healthily. Drink plenty of water each day. Adhere to the government guidance on the amount of alcohol that it is safe to consume each week.

(NHS advice is less than 14 units a week, which is 6 pints of average strength beer or 10 small glasses of low strength wine. They also advise at least three alcohol free days).

- Avoid staying still for too long. Go for walk, work in the garden, do some indoor exercise every day.
- Have a good sleep routine
- Keep in touch. Make sure you speak to someone every day for yourself.

Think about the Parish

Is there a list of important contact numbers and emails of those you need to inform easily to hand that either you or another member of your household can use, if you fall ill or need to self-isolate. (Having them in your phone or computer) may not be sufficient if you are so ill that you cannot access them.

Now is the time to set up an informal clergy / licenced lay workers / church officer clusters with neighbouring parishes so that you can call on each other for help and support. Linking with up to 4 or 5 neighbouring churches will provide some resilience as well as support. Such clusters may not necessarily fall within deaneries but may be more geographically based. Once you have established the cluster inform your area dean. If needed, inform both area deans if your cluster flows across a deanery boundary. In your cluster:

- Exchange key contact details for each other and consider setting up a What's app group or similar to provide a means of communication and support
- Agree how you might work collaboratively, especially if there is a significant increase in the number of funerals
- Exchange key information particularly around how the parish conducts funerals and how you manage your churchyard if open – in case your churchwardens are unable to help a visiting minister
- Think about any key individuals (such as those approaching the end of life) or other ministerial activity (such as foodbanks) which need ongoing ministerial support and what needs to be done if you are unable to provide that support – who will step in – how will they know to step in and what will you expect of them when they do step in?
- Consider what support might be needed for your church schools and other key care providers in the cluster and how care might be shared.

Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) Resilience

All charities and organisations are going to be under intense financial pressure in the months to come and the DBF is no exception. David Barlow (Chair of the DBF) and Bishop Julian have moved to set up a temporary Standing Committee who can make any decisions that may need to be made as swiftly as possible. They will draw up a Financial Resilience Plan.

Clayton House

Clayton House will be closed from the end of today. We will send contact information tomorrow for Diocesan staff. Meanwhile you can always use: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org

Parish Update

Please note that this will be suspended from this point onwards. All information will come through this Daily Briefing.

Daily Briefings online

This Daily Briefing from the Coronavirus Task Group is 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.

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