

Dear Friends,

I am sorry that today's briefing will again be a long one as the pace of events moves with such extraordinary speed. Every day we try to keep it short and we will get there in the end, but this briefing contains a great deal of vital information so please bear with it and read it carefully.

We begin our communication today with a pastoral message from Bishop Julian as we continue to adapt to these fast-changing circumstances. You can read the full text of the message [here on the Diocesan website](#) and watch the video version here [on the Diocesan YouTube channel](#). (Please remember to subscribe to the channel for alerts re future video messages as soon as they go live.)

You will find in this briefing information on the following:

- Occasional offices
- Advice on Church closures
- Livestreaming services
- Worship
- Community Ministry
- PCC Finances

Tomorrow and over the next few days we will have guidance on:

- Pastoral care, especially in extremis
- Establishing new routines and staying fit
- Safeguarding

A number of you have asked for advice on the government job retention scheme for furloughed employees. Andy Cooke has produced some excellent guidelines on this. Please email: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org for a copy.

The National Situation

We are now in completely unprecedented territory following the Prime Minister's directions which bring in strict curbs on daily activity. It is imperative that as Christian leaders we role model these in our daily lives. Please only leave the house if it is strictly necessary to do so and in accord with the guidance we have been given. It is vital to stay in touch with our people but we must do so by phone and computer.

Occasional Offices

No weddings are to take place until further notice.

No baptisms are to take place until further notice. Emergency baptisms can take place at home or hospital, subject to strict hygiene precautions and with social distancing.

No funerals are to take places in churches until further notice. Funerals can only happen at the crematorium or at the graveside. Only immediate family members may attend, that is the spouse, parents and children, keeping distance in the proscribed way.

Advice on Church and Building Closures

You will be used to managing your buildings, so this is a checklist of things to you may wish to consider as you shut your church and other buildings; which might be for a prolonged length of time.

Utilities

- Heating – turn down thermostats to ‘frost-stat’. Turn off heating completely when weather gets warmer.
- Water – turn off main stop tap (if easy to do so) to prevent water leaks.
- If you haven’t drained down the water system - Open each tap for 30 seconds and flush each of the toilets once per week to avoid stagnant water.
- Switch off all electrical appliances at the wall socket.

The Reserved Sacrament (if your parish reserves)

- If it is possible to renew the Reserved Sacrament from time to time, it is best to continue to reserve.
- If this is not possible, the Sacrament should be reverently consumed, the door of the aumbry should be left open and the sanctuary light extinguished.

Refuse/waste

- Empty any bins in the building(s) into the main waste bins.
- Put out the waste bins as usual for current waste already in external bins – visit your local authority’s web page to keep up to date with advice about frequency of collections.
- Remove flowers from the church.

Perishable goods hygiene

- Empty fridges/freezers, clean/de-frost and switch off if possible. Leave de-frosted fridge/freezer doors open
- Remove any perishable goods held on site – including in the church.

Security/Fire prevention

- Alarm – set alarm.
- Key holders – produce a list of keyholders and those who are available to respond to issues? Consider having deputies – especially if keyholders have to self-isolate
- Undertake a weekly walk around the buildings externally and internally (this is permissible under the government guidance which allows everyone exercise each day).
 - Have a nominated person (ideally the priest if they live close or another near neighbour) with a nominated deputy in case of self-isolation/illness. If your priest doesn’t live on site/immediately adjacent to the church, consider contacting people you know who live close to the buildings and ask them to keep an eye out for any suspicious activity. Do not encourage regular trips to the church property.

- Where practicable the person who is visiting should have a mobile phone with them, inform someone when they start doing the check and when they have completed it.
- The person doing the checks should follow good handwashing practice and clean surfaces they have touched (especially doorhandles and metal).
- Emergency maintenance – Please note that the faculty process continues, so please contact Christine Ellis as usual for advice. The archdeacons are also available. Michael Kellett, The Diocesan Surveyor can also be contacted **in emergencies** for advice (07384 544228)
- Lock valuables away in the safe
- Remove any cash eg in wall safes and lock in the safe
- Music/sound equipment – lock away out of sight where feasible.
- Close all internal doors to reduce the impact of any fire
- Ensure you don't store any combustible materials against the buildings to prevent arson

Grounds

- Grass-cutting of churchyards – continue whilst people allowed to be outside. It's not a priority though of course we should continue to have a safe environment for any visitors.

Insurance

- It is wise to consult your insurer about what level of insurance is appropriate for a building that is likely to remain closed for some time. You may also wish to discuss with your insurers about continuing insurance of specific items of value.

Worship

Bishop Julian writes:

Over the coming weeks we face a disruption to our lifestyle that few of us could have imagined even a short time ago. I encourage you to attend to your own care and wellbeing as you care for others. A significant part of this will be embedding in our new context a daily pattern of prayer. Inevitably, this will be based on those patterns that have sustained us throughout our ministry, albeit from our homes. Depending on our experience of God and the traditions which have nurtured and which sustain us, this will take a variety of forms. This is all about being faithful in our vocation and for ordained ministers in particular, how we bring the people of God in our care to the Lord in prayer. Whatever your context, thank you for praying. I know how important it is to know that people pray regularly for me.

Given that we are allowed to take outdoor exercise once per day, it is possible for a priest who lives very close by to walk to their Church and pray there, as long as the building remains locked, they are observing the hygiene rules above and they are alone. This may be of comfort to your people.

However what is most important is the establishment of good patterns of daily prayer and worship within your own home.

- Remember that you are offering prayer for and on behalf of your people. This is about much more than feeding one's own personal spirituality.
- Try and set regular times for prayer and stick to them.
- In so far as the layout of the house and the number of occupants allows, it may be good to have a place set apart for prayer with some visual foci.

Community Ministry

The government in its advice about the new pattern of our lives is clear that essential voluntary and public services can remain open if they are supporting vulnerable people without networks of family and friends. This means that if a church building is being used to this end it can remain open. However the service you are offering must be an essential one with no alternative provision.

If a service continues it must be run strictly according to hygiene guidelines. There is excellent advice from the Trussell Trust (which is remaining open) here:

<https://www.trusselltrust.org/coronavirus-food-banks/>

Livestreaming Services

Livestreaming of services can continue but should only be done from home.

You may wish to draw your people's attention to others who are livestreaming services. The 'A Church Near You' website now has [an interactive map](#) of parishes livestreaming services. Speak to your 'A Church Near You' page editor about adding your parish if you are livestreaming and have not already done so. Please note, as the situation is fast-moving, some parish websites linked to from the map may not yet have caught up with the advice to livestream services from home.

PCC Finances

We are aware that many parish clergy, churchwardens, treasurers and PCC Members (as charity trustees) will be concerned about the effect of prolonged church closures on parish finances. Please find below some initial guidance.

You may also wish to look at the parish resources webpage for advice: <https://www.parishresources.org.uk/coronavirus/>

Income

As a church we should not seek to put pressure on parishioners to continue to give if their personal financial circumstances mean they would be impoverished as a result of giving sacrificially to the church.

Please use discretion when contacting your congregation about financial matters, although encourage them to remember that their parish church is a charity that relies on continued giving to continue to be a symbol of God's presence in their community.

Suggested topics in any communication:

- Thank parishioners for their giving particularly those who give by standing orders
- Envelopes and cash – encourage envelope and cash givers to move to on-line giving direct to the churches bank account where this is possible and, where this is not feasible, encourage them to bring their cash and envelopes once Public Worship restarts. Please contact Stephanie.Rankin@blackburn.anglican.org if you would like advice on setting up standing orders and other forms of on-line giving.

Please remember that Gift Aid is a useful source of income, so consider submitting a claim immediately for any outstanding amounts in this tax year and thereafter monthly, if possible, not forgetting to include GADDS (although recognising that there will be no more small cash donations for the foreseeable future).

Expenditure

Look to reduce costs wherever practicable, including:

- Heating/lighting – turn-off heating or reduce thermostat where practicable in church and other buildings. Turn off-heating completely when the warmer weather arrives.
- Electrical appliances – please see the separate note on preparing your church buildings for extended closure – there may be some electrical items that you can switch off completely at the socket.

If you employ staff (eg parish administrator, organist) please contact Andrew Cooke (Andrew.cooke@blackburn.anglican.org) for advice before reducing or stopping paying salaries and/or laying off of staff.

Cash flow

PCCs should aim to maintain a positive current account balance and not run in to an overdraft.

Review where cash funds are held and transfer from any 'savings' account(s) to current account as required. NB consider the notice period required to access any "savings" accounts.

Discuss with investment providers whether there can be access to fixed-term investments early. You may be concerned about the status of your PCC investments. Please visit the CCLA website <https://www.ccla.co.uk/about-us/an-update-on-recent-market-volatility>

Suggested priority order for reducing payments:

- Utility bills – talk to providers early and offer to pay smaller amounts
- Insurance – approach provider to request spreading payments
- Have a conversation with your clergy about whether it is financially possible for them to defer payment of expenses
- Defer all but essential maintenance to church buildings eg only work to keep buildings water-tight/safe/secure.
- Don't order any new materials for church services and other activities eg communion wine, wafers

- Please remember that even in these difficult times our diocese is dependent on the income received from parish share payments to pay clergy stipends. Please could you be in touch with the DBF Deputy Diocesan Secretary (Finance) Ruth.mcgaughey@blackburn.anglican.org, if you think you may not be able to keep up your regular payments.
- NB If you currently contribute parish share by sending a cheque to Clayton House (which is now closed), please would you strongly consider setting up a standing order via your bank?

Charity Governance

PCCs who are separately registered with the Charity Commission should familiarise themselves with the 'reporting serious incident' process that includes 'serious financial losses' as a criterion. <https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/media/1514/20190710-serious-incident-reporting-guidance-v30.pdf>

Finally...

I think that no one can doubt the seriousness of the situation that faces our nation, and here in Lancashire we are hearing of more and more cases impacting on people in our region and concomitant pressures on health services. It is therefore vital that everyone acts responsibly.

But God is faithful! Let us not doubt that the God of the cross is present in the midst of the darkness of these times, and in ways that are mysterious and unseen, is working out his plan of salvation.

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 that nothing can separate us from your love

in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

Yours,

Bishop Philip and the Coronavirus Task Group