

Dear Friends,

The latest data for Lancashire on the spread of the virus is extremely concerning. Burnley now has the highest infection rate in the country and there has been a steep rise in Preston. Rates remain stubbornly high across the county. It seems only a matter of time before tighter restrictions are introduced in some or all of the county and public health officials are openly discussing a 'circuit breaker' lockdown, perhaps in late October.

Under these circumstances, please note the following:

- It is so important that Churches are known to be Covid-secure places so please don't stretch the rules. **Ask 'What is safe?' not 'What can I get away with?'** Follow the Lancashire wide guidance to avoid contact with others that are outside your household or bubble that is not necessary for work purposes.
- The advice remains that church services should be kept reasonably short and this has been underlined recently by the Lancashire Resilience Forum.
- We need to be prepared now in case HM Government again orders a closure of places of worship. Please think through this scenario in your parishes.

Ministry in such times is tough and so we include in this briefing some advice on caring for yourself.

With events moving so speedily we will have two briefings this week, today and Friday. We promise some more cheery and upbeat content at the end of the week!

Pastoral Visiting

We have updated the advice on pastoral visiting. You can see the latest version [here](#).

What to do if Someone in your Congregation tests Positive for Covid

This is a question that more people are now asking as rates rise.

- The guidance is clear that you only need to isolate if you are contacted by NHS Test and Trace, and then to only get a test if you display symptoms.
- However we know that NHS Test and Trace is struggling in our region so you might want to add a layer of personal wisdom to this and be more careful and alert, maybe even self isolate if you have had close contact with someone who is positive.
- According to PHE a close 'contact' is a person who has been close to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 anytime from 2 days before the person was symptomatic up to 10 days from onset of symptoms (this is when they're infectious to others). This could be a person who:
 - spends significant time in the same household
 - is a sexual partner
 - has had face-to-face contact (within one metre), including:
 - being coughed on
 - having skin-to-skin physical contact, or
 - contact within one metre for one minute
 - has been within 2 metres of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes
 - has travelled in a small vehicle, or in a large vehicle or plane

- If more than one person from your church tests positive for Covid-19 then you should follow the guidance for suspected local outbreaks found [here](#).

Please email if you are unclear or unsure about what to do.

Small Groups and Bible Study Groups

Small groups are a critical part of church life for many people and a key way in which we grow disciples. However this is also an area where many people are tempted to push at the boundaries in a way that could prove unhelpful if we are seeking to demonstrate that we are Covid-secure.

The Church of England has said that a small group such as a Bible Study Group is seen as a social activity and not an act of public worship. This means that the rule of six applies. We would strongly advise against running a number of 'groups of six' concurrently in the same building. Please either restrict numbers or use video-conferencing.

Church Ventilation and Heating

Another question coming to the email address is about church heating. It is safe to operate nearly all forms of church heating.

Types of heating that present a Covid-19 risk are those that take air from one occupied space in a building and move it into another occupied space. If your heating or ventilation system has this feature it must be turned off so that air is not moved from one space to another. The system can be used with the feature turned off. It is extremely unlikely that a traditional church building will have such a system, but if in doubt ask the company that services your heating. If you worship in a building that has little or no natural ventilation the [guidance from the HSE](#) will assist you in assessing an appropriate heating and ventilation strategy.

No Covid-related concerns have been identified with the use of traditional hot water radiator systems, electric heating (including under pew), underfloor heating, or, in a ventilated space, fan convactor heaters. In a ventilated space, fan convectors can assist with reducing pockets of stagnant air. They are not recommended in a space that does not have natural ventilation.

The cooler autumn and winter weather will promote some forms of natural ventilation, meaning that adequate ventilation will be achieved with a reduction in the number of windows open, and the amount they need to be open. If there is high level ventilation it will not usually be necessary to leave lower-level windows open.

If your current Covid-safe practice relies on leaving doors fixed open to promote good ventilation now would be a good time to consider how you would operate with fewer (or no) doors fixed open.

For detailed guidance consult the [CIBSE website](#).

Caring for Yourself

Early on in the pandemic we offered a few pieces of work aimed at helping us to look after ourselves and others in light of the inevitable associated distress. Much of this advice remains just as relevant and helpful now that we have moved out of the acute phase of the pandemic. However, while we remain in some form of lockdown, the nature of the challenge we face has changed one of a much more chronic nature.

We recently marked 6 months since the lockdown began in March. New Government restrictions are expected to be in place, in one form or another, for another 6 months. The ability to cope fuelled solely by adrenaline and caffeine ceased long time ago. It is abundantly clear we are not going to be able to 'white-knuckle' our way through this. Any notion that we would be 'back to normal' and 'out the other side' sometime soon has gone. In its place is an ever-present, gnawing, low-level uncertainty – perhaps even stress or anxiety. When this kind of feeling continues to bubble away under the surface for so long there can be a number of negative effects. The following aims to highlight some of these and encourage us towards establishing sustainable rhythms of life that will enable us and our churches to not only to survive, but even thrive during this time.

Fatigue. One issue of dealing with constant emotional flux and uncertainty is sheer fatigue – whether physical, emotional, psychological, compassion, etc. What sets the current experience apart from earlier in the pandemic is that many churches have regained some of their 'busyness'. We are beginning to re-start many of our original ministries (in new and innovative ways) perhaps on top of new things we discovered earlier on in the lockdown. We do so, of course, with the added complication of ever-changing restrictions and a list of seemingly endless decisions to be made. We must recognise how fatiguing this is in ourselves and others. Allow for the fact that it may take far less than usual to tire us out. We may need to adopt different rhythms of life and ministry that are more sustainable and resilient in light of this. Take a break and rest without feeling guilty about it. Also encourage others in your team and congregation to do the same.

Isolation. Many people living on their own are already dreading a very lonely winter and Christmas. Young families struggling to cope with the burdens of childcare are worried how they will keep going for another 6 months without help from others. Grandparents are missing grandchildren. Friends are missing socialising. The list goes on. We must be honest about the reality of this enforced isolation. As a church family we can and must provide support and community for one another as we plan for and maintain new ways to connect with and support one another.

Stress. When we carry around low-level feelings of unease and confusion it can be easy for things to 'build up'. Small things quickly add up to become very big things sometimes leading to surprisingly dramatic or volatile responses. Add to this the fact that much of our present ministry carries a greater sense of risk as we find ourselves exempt from some of the restrictions governing other areas of life. This brings a great sense of responsibility which can be a challenging burden to bear. We can sometimes help ourselves by limiting the amount and sources of information we consume regarding Covid. In addition, this is a good opportunity to recognise our creaturely dependence upon God. We can only deal with and control so much. Try not to pre-empt or anticipate potential issues too far down the line – sufficient for the day is the trouble thereof.

Selfishness. When faced with the current circumstances, we can tend to become rather introspective and curved in on ourselves. When we are so acutely aware of the difficulties in our own lives, it can become difficult to notice, or even think to look for, the needs of others. This may be the needs of our church family or wider community. As those called to imitate the love of Christ we must be especially on the defence against such tendencies. As we bring our own needs to Christ and experience his abundant provision and satisfaction, let us learn once again the “freedom of self-forgetfulness” as we seek to love others.

Conflict. As more and more of our church activities are re-commencing in some form or another, this inevitably means we are cooperating with others more. This is of course an immense joy, but also a challenge as imperfect (and stressed out) people can easily rub one another up the wrong way. When experiencing difficulties ourselves, it can be easy to fail to see other people’s perspective or we can impute uncharitable motives or assumptions to the actions of others. We must be careful to think the best of one another and seek to be ministers of reconciliation and peace in our communities. This will mean creating an environment of honesty and forgiveness, where accounts are kept short and grace and understanding abounds.

Despondency. There hasn’t been much good news recently. In addition, as we journey on together through these current trials, we will no doubt become acutely aware of the weaknesses, imperfections, and limitations in ourselves, others and our community. This is often an uncomfortable, painful and messy experience. However, this is also frequently the place where God’s grace is most wonderfully at work. It was in and through the darkest moment of human history that our salvation was won. Therefore, in these current dark times there is ample hope that God is at work building his kingdom and transforming us into the likeness of his Son. “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9)

The Coronavirus Email Address

If you have questions or problems, please get in touch: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org
Please email if you are off work or shielding.

**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.**

Yours,

The Coronavirus Task Group