

Dear Friends,

Please bear with this briefing as it carries a great deal of important information.

We are still absorbing the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday and today's announcement that the whole of Lancashire has been placed in the new Tier 3 (see below). But the good news is that public worship can be restored from Wednesday December 2. It is clear that the Government has become aware of the measures that churches have taken in ensuring that they are Covid secure, and it is this confidence that lies behind the decision.

On the one hand this is an acknowledgement of the huge amount of hard work that you have done to ensure that your church buildings are safe and thank you for this. On the other it shows how important it is that we continue to place Covid-security high on the agenda and don't become slipshod. Please go on doing what you were doing – social distancing, face masks, cleaning, ventilation, recording attendance etc. It's hard work, we know. But so important.

Government Announcement - Public Worship and Occasional Offices

To summarise the current position:

- Public worship can re-commence from December 2
- Congregational singing is still not permitted and we are still awaiting further guidance on this following ongoing scientific research. Outdoor and door to door singing will be permitted and there will be a carol service special edition to discuss this next week
- Encourage attendees not to mingle before or after the service

Occasional Offices

Whatever tier we may end up in:

- Attendance at **funerals** is restricted to 30
- Attendance at **weddings** is restricted to 15
- There is no guidance on **baptisms**. It is therefore safe to presume that we revert to previous guidance which means that baptism constitutes public worship and you may allow as many to attend as your risk assessment states.

The New Three-tier System

We now know that the whole of Lancashire will be in tier 3. A reminder of what this means (quoting the BBC website):

- You can't mix with other households indoors, or in private gardens and pub gardens
- You can meet in a group of up to six in other outdoor spaces, such as parks, beaches or countryside
- Hospitality venues - such as bars, pubs, cafes and restaurants must close, except for delivery and takeaway services
- Spectator sports cannot resume
- Indoor entertainment venues - such as bowling alleys and cinemas - must close
- People are advised not to travel to and from tier three area

Advent Sunday Worship

- For Advent Sunday, our 9am Diocesan Service will be led this week by Bishop Julian. You can join in on the [Diocesan Youtube Channel](#).
- And a double treat from our Cathedral as we begin this season of watching and waiting:
 - There will be the usual 9am Sunday service focusing on the Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent. Simply tune in to the [Cathedral webpage](#).
 - Then from 4pm the boys, girls and youth choir will lead us in a very special **Advent Carol Service** with music and readings. [This can be viewed here](#) or on the Cathedral website above.

Weekly Message

This week's message has been recorded by Archdeacon David. His theme, 'Watching and Waiting' will help us to prepare for Advent. Please go to the [Diocesan YouTube Channel](#) to watch.

Advent and Christmas

We are now clearer about making plans for Christmas. At the same time we acknowledge how complex this will be, especially in larger churches.

Do think carefully about how you will manage indoor services so that numbers can be limited to what is safe in terms of social distance. This may mean people booking in advance or issuing tickets. It may also mean repeating services.

There are a huge range of online resources and ideas on the Diocesan Website including retreats for Advent and resources for Christmas. [These can all be seen here.](#)

Outdoor Carol Singing

Again, we are still awaiting guidance! It seems that this will be legal and possible in some form or another and we will bring clarity next week.

The 'Christmas Break' and Clergy Wellbeing

Whilst we still need to make sensible decisions and be aware of risk, government has permitted three households to meet together indoors between December 23 and 27. This however poses significant problems for clergy, especially single clergy and those whose are some distance from their families, because many of us will have worship to lead on December 24, 25 and 27!

It is so important the clergy are able to have a break and see loved ones over Christmas and so we would recommend the following:

- Think now about what you can do to plan worship on December 27. It may be possible to arrange cover.
- An alternative would be, for this one Sunday, to make provision across a local network or even within a Deanery so that a smaller number of clergy can offer cover in a limited number of churches. This can be enhanced with pre-recorded online worship.
- In extremis an LLM or authorised lay person can offer Communion by Extension.
- When making such arrangements please be aware of the particular needs of some priests especially those who are single or far away from their families.

'Call to Pray and Give'

We are continuing to pray for our Diocese and invite people to make a one-off sacrificial gift to their Parish church as we navigate choppy times. Please note that the day when we will be inviting people to make their gift will now be December 6 – the first Sunday when we will be back in church.

Nightly prayer led by a member of the Bishop's Leadership Team continues until tomorrow night (27). Booking details for that, plus a whole host of wonderful Call to Pray and Give resources, can be found [here on the Diocesan website](#).

Coronavirus Email Address

Don't forget that if you have questions or problems you can get in touch with the Task Group by emailing: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org. It is important that clergy who are self-isolating send us a note to this address.

Loving God,
at this time of crisis
when so many are suffering,
we pray for our nation and our world.

Give our leaders wisdom,
our Health Service strength,
our people hope.

Lead us through these parched and difficult days
to the fresh springs of joy and comfort
that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Yours,

The Coronavirus Task Group