

Dear Friends,

Advent may have only just begun, but this briefing is something of a Christmas Special as we try to support your Christmas planning with the latest news and guidance. It will be a strange, simple, pared down Christmas, but perhaps one in which we can discover afresh the Christ who was born into our poverty so that we could share in the riches of heaven.

We are now starting to get used to the new tier system and yet another set of regulations. However generally the news in our region is quite good. One report suggests that infection rates in the North West have decreased by 57% from the September peak which shows that the sacrifices we have all had to make are having an impact.

Life remains very hard though for many of our schools who have had a torrid term. Please continue to pray for teachers and school leaders as they continue to deal with constant change and management of crisis.

Christmas

[There is very clear guidance from the Church of England](#) which also links to the official Government document on Christmas. The main headlines are as follows:

Carol Singing and Services – Indoors

- Choirs are able to sing carols in worship but members of congregations may not.
- Please be sure to limit numbers in a service to those which have been agreed as part of your risk assessment. You may need to issue tickets or use an online booking system such as [Eventbrite](#) to ensure that social distancing can be maintained in the church.
- It may be worth having a supply of face coverings as we need to be ready to welcome people who are unused to the guidance that applies to church buildings.

Carol Singing and Services – Outdoors

- At outdoor carol services, groups of people may sing, but they should be very careful to be standing at least 2 metres apart from other households. Please give a great deal of thought to how you will manage unexpected numbers at any outdoor events.
- It is advisable to inform the Police of outdoor Christmas events. You can do that by calling 111, going to the [Lancashire Police website](#) or contacting your local PCSO.
- Door to door carol singing is also allowed as long as singers remain 2 metres apart from each other and from the threshold of any property. We are advised to follow guidance [from the performing arts](#).

Choirs and Choir Rehearsals

- Choir rehearsals may go ahead but should be carefully risk assessed with proper social distancing maintained. [There is excellent guidance from the RSCM here](#) which should be closely adhered to.

#ComfortandJoy

- There is a terrific short animation about the Church of England's Comfort and Joy campaign [here](#). Please do share it as widely as possible.

Christmas in the Diocese of Blackburn

- Parish Update last week announced three diocesan events around the Christmas period that will go out through various online channels. More information about that and other Christmas resources [can be found here](#).

Weekly Message

This week's message will be from Archdeacon Mark and can be found on the [Diocesan YouTube Channel](#).

Sunday Worship

The Diocesan Service will be a multi-lingual one, led by The Revd Sarah Gill and with a sermon from Bishop Julian's Chaplain, the Revd Sam Cheesman. It can be viewed from 9am onwards on the [Diocesan YouTube channel](#).

Meanwhile over at the Cathedral, we are again invited to join with Sunday worship for the second Sunday of Advent from 9am. This will be on [the Cathedral website](#). What's more it's not too late to join in with the very special Advent Carol Service [which can be viewed here](#).

Cover over Christmas

Now is a good time to renew the local networks that we formed at the start of this pandemic to ensure that cover arrangements are in place to allow clergy to have a post-Christmas break. It will be especially important that as many as possible can take December 27th off to be with families. Bishop Julian has given permission for parishes to be as imaginative as necessary in sharing worship or going online that Sunday.

Compendium Update

The compendium of Coronavirus advice has been updated on the Diocesan webpage to come into line with the latest situation. [It can be seen here](#).

Recipients of this Briefing

As a number of new office holders take up their posts in churches across the diocese the Task Group is conscious that some people will be in receipt of this briefing who may no longer feel they need it. The briefing is not sent out using its own list but rather uses the Diocesan system which takes a while to update with the correct names and emails of all the new churchwardens and PCC secretaries. If you are in receipt of this briefing but no longer need (or wish!) to be then please mark it as 'junk' until you are removed from the system. If you have not yet sent in the new details for office holders then please do so.

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

The Coronavirus Task Group