

Dear Friends,

There is increasing cause for optimism as the vaccines demonstrate their effectiveness. The new Health Secretary seems very confident that most of the remaining restrictions will be removed from July 19 and there are also positive noises being made about the return of singing and about face mask coverings in church, though no firm commitments have been made yet.

So now could be the time to dust off those plans for Summer and for Autumn and think what our three unlock headings might look like in your Parish. How will you make space for people to **lament** what they have been through? How will you give **thanks** for those places where God has been especially at work in the past twelve months? In what areas might the **mission** of your parish develop as we seek to satisfy a new hunger for the Gospel?

There are however two things to bear in mind through all this:

First, some people might be nervous if all restrictions are dropped at once. Some parishes are coming up with their own internal roadmaps to withdraw restrictions gradually and so build up people's confidence. An example from New Longton is [here](#).

Second, whilst some are raring to go, many clergy and lay leaders are feeling weary and run down. There is a degree to which the trauma of the past year is catching up and it was striking how many people described a listlessness on our recent clergy study days. Don't feel bad about this. Instead make some space for yourself and make room to attend to your own spiritual wellbeing. If things aren't getting any better, tell someone.

Vaccine Rollout

The standing ovation for the developers of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine at Wimbledon reminded us the huge impact that the vaccines have had in pulling us out of the worst of the crisis. The covid-19 vaccine is now available to all over 18s and it may be available to over 12s at some point in the future. Please do keep encouraging your people to take advantage of this.

Testing

Please don't stop testing yourself regularly, especially prior to Sunday mornings, using the kits that are freely available from numerous places including pharmacies.

Clergy Self-Isolating

It is clear that the delta variant is moving through the younger population and numerous schools are now affected. This means that we have more clergy self-isolating than at any stage in the past 18 months, and a number who have tested positive. Please be aware of the needs of clergy around you who are having to isolate and offer support as you are able. Our local networks should help with this.

Insurance

One or two people have asked questions about EIG insurance and whether they would be covered if they make a mistake in their adherence to the Church of England guidelines. This has triggered a conversation between the Archdeacon of Lancaster and EIG who offered much reassurance.

- Ecclesiastical are very clear that if churches act reasonably within the guidelines they will be covered. Of course, negligent behaviour is just that but we have no real evidence it is happening.
- No-one will be liable if the choir/singing group are clearly socially distanced and acting according to general guidelines. Specifically if they can 'fit' 7 in a space which is safe they will be fine.
- Ecclesiastical cannot see how anyone can prove they 'caught Covid' from a building. It would be virtually impossible to trace. Therefore, the only issue would be 'interaction.'
- Ecclesiastical are highly unlikely to regard a parish (church) as uninsured unless there is clear proof that they are not seeking to follow best practice.

Online Worship this Sunday

An Act of Worship from Blackburn Cathedral will be available every Sunday from 9am. You can view this on the [Cathedral YouTube Channel](#) or on [Facebook](#).

You can find details of other online service using the [A Church Near You](#) website.

From Our Chaplains

Chaplaincies in our hospitals and prisons have been at the frontline of the pandemic throughout the past 18 months. Here two of our Chaplains, The Revd Calum Crombie from Wymott Prison and The Revd Helen Houston from Blackpool Victoria Hospital, bring us to speed:

Wymott Prison

Back in early 2020 we began some very sobering conversations. In an institution that houses over 1150 men and employs around 700 staff, hearing statistics that around 80% of people might be infected and 1% might die certainly caused me to take a sharp intake of breath. This was further compounded when we realised that around 40% of our population were classed as clinically or extremely clinically vulnerable.

Like the rest of the country we went into lockdown. You might wonder what difference that might make in a prison, but things changed markedly. Visits from family and friends stopped, employment and education ceased and of course worship was curtailed very early on. Prisoners in the initial weeks were only afforded 45 minutes out of their cells each day, along with a slightly enhanced food provision.

We worried not only about how the virus would affect our community, but the impact the lack of activity and stimulation would have. We worked hard to keep the environment not only safe but motivating. Quickly we managed to cohort (bubble) prisoners and expanded 45 minutes to 90. We made regular calls to families on behalf of our residents who had to

isolate because of symptoms, or as time went on because of a positive test result. The chaplaincy have produced in-cell worship packs to encourage prisoners to continue engaging with their faith and with us as chaplains. Over 300 of these go out each week and as we are currently working on our 68th pack, they have also acted as a timely reminder on how far we have come.

As a community we have suffered the loss of six of our colleagues in the last 15 months. The feelings of grief and loss have been intense and this has been the hardest part to bear. Especially as we are navigating these feelings in an environment of social distance. So many lives have been touched by these losses and it is testament to the esteem that these colleagues were held in that they are missed so much.

We continue to work and live under quite strict conditions in prisons. We are not unlocking at the same speed as the community outside. Family visits have only recently started back and only in a limited way. We are in discussions regarding how and when corporate worship, education and employment will resume for the prisoners. There are still only limited opportunities to see and speak with prisoners on a one to one basis and this is the main focus of our work.

Despite the rigours of the pandemic, prisons and prisoners have coped remarkably well. There have even been some benefits: acts of violence, self-harm and substance abuse are all reduced. Anecdotally we believe that prisoners are experiencing less bullying and intimidation. We are currently looking at how we can retain some lockdown elements like cohorting which have brought benefits. It is clear that we are not yet at the end of the journey in dealing with this pandemic, but we are very much looking and moving forward into our 'new normality'.

Blackpool Victoria Hospital

Let me tell you about two developments in the life of my hospital which speak volumes for where we've been and where we're going.

The first, is the 'SWAN'* , introduced to Blackpool in the early days of the pandemic last year. Its aim is to deliver high quality care for our end of life patients and their loved ones. It's an initiative which brings together all those working in palliative and bereavement care across the hospital - Chaplaincy included - as well as partner organisations in the area such as hospices and care homes. Some 767 families in Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre, have lost loved ones within 28 days of them testing positive for coronavirus. At least now, because of SWAN, and as a result of Covid, we're better equipped to help all of our end of life patients and their families cope with the stark reality of death and all that that means.

The other significant development in the life of the hospital is the increased investment in the Staff Health and Well-Being Centre. It has been said many times, but bears repeating, that staff have gone above and beyond to care for patients during the pandemic often at a cost to themselves and their families. I know of colleagues who've been left with deep psychological scars and others who've packed in their careers because of what they've been through. The investment in the care of the colleagues who remain is much needed. There's a lot of work to be done and our Department is privileged to have been asked to play our part in the support on offer.

Please keep us in your prayers.

** For more information about the SWAN at Blackpool Victoria Hospital, please see: [Help for grieving families | Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust \(bfwh.nhs.uk\)](#)*

And finally...

This is Ordination weekend! Please pray for the 12 men and women to be ordained to the Diaconate and a further 12 to be ordained to the Priesthood this Saturday and Sunday. They are all currently on retreat at our Centre for Christian Discipleship and Prayer at Whalley Abbey.

Full coverage via the Diocesan website. Right now, if you [visit this page](#) there is a full list of all the ordinands and where they will be serving. All the service times can also be found on this page, as well as a link to the Cathedral YouTube channel on which all the services will be livestreamed. If you are active on social media follow @cofelancs and @bbcathedral using #newrevs; also on @churchofengland

By tomorrow in the [website news section](#) you can also view pictures of the ordinands taken at the rehearsals for the services prior to going on retreat - both individual and (socially distanced) group shots; alongside 'questionnaire profiles' of each candidate and a special pre-ordination weekend video.

Then look out on Monday for post-ordination weekend coverage - including more pictures.

Coronavirus Email Address

If you have questions or problems and can't find answers on the [advice compendium](#) 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
Coronavirus Task Group