

Dear Friends,

The Prime Minister's announcement that most remaining restrictions are to be withdrawn from July 19th will have caused a great deal of excitement amongst our parishes but will also have raised a lot of questions.

We are awaiting detailed guidance from the Church of England. The Recovery Group will be meeting on July 14th and we hope to hear from them soon after that. They are *"intending to produce guidance that sets out general good practice with regards to public health and a risk assessment to help churches decide if additional measures may be needed conscious of their community and environment. This will be prefaced by a pastoral/theological introduction that emphasises that church leaders know their own communities and will be best placed to make informed decisions about how to manage the risk to themselves and others."*

From July 19th, congregational singing will be permitted and there will be no limit on the size of choirs. Regulations on social distancing and face coverings will be withdrawn. The common cup will be permitted and it is possible that we will no longer be required to keep a record of those attending our churches.

However, there will be real wisdom in phasing these measures in, partly for public health reasons and partly so that our people feel confident in attending worship. It may for example be worth considering for a short period of time:

- Moving from 2 metres to 1 metres social distancing in pews
- Asking people to wear face coverings into church even if they remove them once they have reached their seats
- Offering the chalice in such a way that it is easy for people to make their own decision on whether to receive under both kinds
- In larger churches, have an area where people who are more anxious can retain 2 metre social distancing
- Continue to supply hand sanitiser
- Offer refreshments, but maybe do so when people are still seated

The new emphasis moves us away from rules towards personal responsibility and this creates decision making challenges for the local church which may feel even more difficult than shutting down. There is also a risk of local disagreements. However you as clergy and lay leaders have become incredibly adept in recent months at acting wisely, intelligently and as local circumstances determine. Please make sure that decisions are made with lay leaders such as churchwardens and listen to the mood of your congregation. The resources from the national church should also be of great help.

And through it all, let's delight that once more we can open our hearts and our voices and sing the praises of God, our Rock, who even in testing times is faithful to us.

Recovery Group Statement

The Bishop of London has issued a statement following the Prime Minister's statement on 5th July. It can be found [here](#).

This link also takes you to the site where detailed guidance will appear next week.

Unlock: Clergy/LLM Study Day Content Available for All

A recent series of study days for clergy and LLMs explored where God is calling us as church leaders in this diocese after this crisis and focussed on forming new local congregations as a way to reach people with the Gospel.

The content of these days is now available on YouTube and can be viewed [here](#).

The interview with The Revd Dr Jeremy Duff (Bishop Jill's husband) is especially worth watching.

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 always find online services from local churches using the A Church Near You website.

Schools

The past few weeks have been ferociously difficult for our schools as they have coped with numerous burst COVID bubbles leading to the loss of precious time in school for hundreds of thousands of children. One of our school chaplains described the past two weeks as the worst period of the whole pandemic.

Please keep all our schools in your prayers as they approach the last few days of term. Another of our chaplains, Simon Corner at St Michael's High School in Chorley, has written the following brief reflection:

"Schools have largely remained open during the lockdowns which has meant the regular pressures of school have been added to by those of the COVID crisis. Uncertainty, anxiety, lack of social contact, anger, illness, grief, loss, the challenges of learning at home and students being told they are a lost generation are just some of the issues we continue to face in school. Despite some national relaxations, we are still distancing where possible, still wear masks in class, have restrictions on visitors to school and have class and year-group 'bubbles'.

In the midst of this Chaplains in schools have been striving to remind people that God knows and cares, He is with us, there is Hope in Christ, and that this is an opportunity to take stock and consider what we value in our society today. We've had to develop lots of new IT skills,

as well as learning about filming and copyright laws. Pastoral conversations with both staff and students have increased massively as has the range of issues. Looking forward I pray we can continue to bring a message of certainty and hope in Jesus, as well as keeping some of the positive changes in society that we have seen as a result of COVID.”

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.