

Dear Friends,

March 23 marks the first anniversary of the national lockdown. In that time over 125,000 people have died in the UK after testing positive, many more have been seriously ill (some with the distressing symptoms of long Covid), education has been disrupted and numerous jobs have been lost. It is to remember the cost of the pandemic and to pray for our nation as we look to the future that March 23 is being marked as a National Day of Reflection. Please see below for more.

Meanwhile the vaccination programme has been an extraordinary achievement for which we need to give thanks. But the recent delay in supplies and rumours over the safety of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine demonstrate how precarious the roadmap and its associated dates are. We should be planning for events in the summer as we emerge from the crisis by looking outwards to our communities, but all with a lightness of touch in case plans need to change at the last minute.

National Day of Reflection

To mark the Day of Reflection churches are urged to:

- Remember the first anniversary in worship this coming Sunday
- Invite people to keep a silence of one minute at 12 noon on March 23
- Encourage people to place a light or candle in their window at 8pm on the same day

There are many more ideas and suggestions on the [Church of England website](#) and information about what is happening locally [on the Diocesan website](#). The Cathedral will be lighting more than 3000 candles to represent all the lives lost across the County to Covid-19, joining other Cathedrals across the country in marking the day.

Weekly Message

The Weekly Message this week come from Bishop Julian and it will be available [here on the Diocesan YouTube channel](#).

Sunday Worship

This week's Sunday Service comes from Preston Minster and is led by the Rev Sam Haigh. It will be available on Sunday [here on the Diocesan YouTube channel](#).

Holy Week

It is good to see the extent to which Parishes are engaging their imaginations as they prepare for Holy Week whilst sticking to the restrictions. There is a very helpful guide to what can and cannot be done this year [on the Church of England website](#).

Worshipping Outdoors

We have had numerous requests about whether it is possible to gather for worship and sing outdoors as was made possible at Christmas. Sadly the answer is currently no because the Government has not allowed that exception for Easter. This will be a sadness for many churches for whom much-loved traditions such as processions and walks on Good Friday and outdoor sunrise vigils/services on Easter Day will not be possible.

Lancashire County Council is in touch with Government and the Directors of Public Health over this issue and is also asking about outdoor singing and we are grateful to them for their interest and concern for the Christian community. If there are updates we will be in touch.

Ministry to the Bereaved

Recent news coverage [such as this](#) has highlighted the pain felt by numerous families who have been bereaved during the lockdown when funeral ministry has been so restricted. We are aware also of the cost of this ministry for clergy and others involved in funeral ministry. Whilst there are no easy answers, now may be the time to start to plan memorial services or services of remembrance in the late summer or early autumn. The Church of England is intending to provide resources for this.

Infection Hotspots

For those wishing to keep track of infection rates in their local area [this is a very helpful website](#).

Easter Leave

For the past twelve months clergy and key lay leaders have been working with significantly raised levels of stress and having to make constant adjustments to patterns and styles of ministry all of which takes its toll. Please do try and take some time off after Easter, and if you cannot, plan something now for later in the spring. Area Deans can advise on service cover.

Two Upcoming Events

Teach us to Pray: A Lent Study Afternoon with the Canon Theologian. Led by Canon Dr Jenn Strawbridge, this will take place on Zoom at 2pm on Thursday, March 25. The event, which will last an hour, is mainly aimed at clergy, but will also be of interest to others who are involved in preaching or developing their understanding of the Bible. More details and booking info [here](#).

How Deep the Father's Love: A Quiet Day in preparation for Holy Week. Led by Bishop Philip on Saturday, March 27 from 9.30-1pm. This time of prayer and preparation for laypeople and clergy will focus on Jesus' seven last words from the cross. More details, including booking info, [here](#)

Coronavirus Email Address

If you have questions or problems please email: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org.

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
In their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
through him who suffered alone on the cross,
but reigns with you in glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Yours

Coronavirus Task Group