

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the one hundredth edition of the Coronavirus briefing!

When the task group was formed last March we would never have imagined that our work would need to continue for quite so long, and yet we find ourselves at perhaps the worst stage of the crisis with infection rates caused by a mutated virus spreading across the region and not expected to peak for three or four weeks yet.

Along with other professionals, the pressure on clergy remains considerable. One of the task group was speaking this morning about 'moral trauma,' a phrase which describes the emotional impact of making decisions that you never thought you would have to make. We need to acknowledge that the next few weeks will remain hard and use to the full the networks that we have for support. If you are lacking in such networks or feeling that the pressure is really getting to you, please contact a Bishop, an Archdeacon, an Area Dean or send an email – only two of us see the Coronavirus email address which means that confidences can be kept.

At the same time the vaccination programme offers hope, so now might be the time to start dreaming some dreams and planning for the activities you might hold in the summer as we look to rebuild the life of our Christian communities.

Public Worship

Last week witnessed some extremely difficult decisions for church leaders as we were confronted with conflicting advice. Whatever decision you reached about sustaining public worship or going online, it will need to be kept under review. Those who have suspended will need to remember that Christians are called to gather and will need to judge when it is safe to re-start. Those who are continuing with public worship will need to continue to monitor the situation and ensure that guidance is being rigidly followed and standards maintained.

And despite the anguish that many of you have felt, it is important that we don't lose our focus on other areas of ministry, especially pastoral care of our people, reaching out in love and service to those who are struggling and praying for our nation. Do not overlook the power of a simple message sent by post or a quick phone call. If the worship debate is taking all your time and attention, leaving you (or those you work with) little resource for other aspects of ministry then it may be right to re-examine the decisions you are making. If you have changed worship arrangements please remember to keep your online communications and 'A Church Near You' entry up to date. Our worship is public so even if it has gone online we must continue to help the public to access it.

And if you have closed for worship, please inform Bishop Julian either by emailing him direct or by sending a note to the Coronavirus Task Group. The registry has emphasised the importance of Bishop Julian having this information.

Occasional Offices

Although we are colloquially saying that public worship has been suspended in some churches, what in fact has been dispensed with is the Sunday service requirements under Canons B11 and B14. On that basis, churches which have suspended worship can open for occasional offices and time limited service such as funerals (or weddings and baptisms in exceptional circumstances) can take place.

However, if you have suspended public worship on the basis of risk, then we would recommend you perform a new risk assessment which is specific to the service in question and discuss the results of this with the families involved. Your pastoral skills will once again be called upon and are greatly appreciated.

New Church of England Guidance

There is updated guidance on the Church of England website on a wide range of areas so please do visit. It can be found [here](#).

It includes new guidance on worship. It is critical that those of you continuing to offer public worship have a look at this.

The guidance on the Church of England website is drawn from new and more detailed Government guidance which can be found [here](#) for those who want to see the whole document.

Choirs and Singing

Please note that new guidance on singing confirms what we said last week which is that choirs and music groups should cease to operate in public worship. The new guidance, which is in the FAQ section of the website, allows for a keyboard player and a single vocalist but permits a maximum of three musicians in exceptional circumstances.

Further advice and guidance is available from the [RSCM webpage](#).

Free CPAS Webinar: Leading Through Lockdown 3.0

As we continue to navigate through the current challenges, we want to highlight an upcoming event we think will be helpful at this time. The Church Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS) has invited clergy and licensed ministers from our Diocese and other Dioceses across the country to attend a FREE webinar led by CPAS Leadership Principal James Lawrence. The webinar will explore a number of themes, including how this lockdown is different from previous ones and will also suggest three things we can all do to lead well through the next month or so.

There are two dates to choose from: Wednesday, January 20 (2-3pm) or Thursday, January 21 (10-11am). Book your place at www.cpas.org.uk/webinars (you will be sent joining details the day before).

Diocesan Website and Advice Compendium

This has again been updated and can be seen [here](#).

The Weekly Message

Bishop Philip has recorded this week's message, a reflection on Psalm 23 and 'Walking through the valley of the shadow of death.' Watch it [here](#).

Worship this Sunday

The Diocesan Sunday service this week - 'Seeing the Good News spread' - will be from Ansdell and Fairhaven, led by the Revd Paul Bye. You can watch on Sunday morning or at another time via [this link](#) to the Diocesan YouTube channel which is live now.

Coronavirus Email Address

If you have questions or problems please email: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org. It is important that clergy who are self-isolating send us a note to this address.

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.