

Dear Friends,

This has been a challenging week because of the grim news of 100,000 Covid-19 deaths since the pandemic began. It is hard to imagine the scale of grief and loss that lies behind that figure. The hope we proclaim in Jesus whose love is stronger than death is something we need to share with confidence in the places we serve.

It was good to hear the role of churches within their communities more widely acknowledged this week. A bi-product of the letter from Lancashire's Directors of Public Health (DPH) is that we have now established a good working relationship with them. More of this below, but Sakthi Kurananithi, DPH for Lancashire, was very keen that we should pass on his thanks to *all* our churches and church leaders for what they are doing in this pandemic to serve the needs of our communities, especially their most vulnerable members.

If there is one thing that we are all most definitely learning at the moment it is about the virtue of patience. There are plenty of good signs. Over 200,000 people in Lancashire have now been vaccinated and infection rates, though still high, are starting to come down. But it is plain that the present lockdown is still going to run on for some time.

Archbishops' Call to Prayer

To mark 100,000 deaths from the virus the Archbishops are calling people to prayer every evening at 6pm from February 1st. You can find out more information and a range of resources [here](#).

Lancashire Director of Public Health

The Director of Public Health for Lancashire is fully aware of the impact of the advice that places of worship opt voluntarily to close (even though national regulations allow us to remain open) and they are keeping this under constant review. It is unlikely that the advice will change before mid-February as they wish to see the infection rates continue on a downward trend for a more sustained period. We will keep you informed of any updates to this situation as soon as we are able.

Preparing to re-open for Public Worship

As promised last week we are preparing some advice with four simple questions that parish leaders are advised to ask as they prepare to re-open churches for Public Worship, but in the light of the DPH's advice being unlikely to change before mid-February we will send this to you next week.

Covid, Faith and Public Health: A Zoom Webinar

A 'Covid, faith and public health; dispelling myths and discerning truths' webinar is taking place on February 4, from 10.30am to noon. The webinar is the latest in a series being run by the Lancashire Forum of Faiths in collaboration with the Lancashire Resilience Forum and Churches Together in Lancashire. The event will help to explain the science of Covid 19 and its transmission, dispel myths around Covid vaccination (and testing) and discuss the challenges of communicating health messages. A member of the Coronavirus Task Group The Rev Dr Susan Salt, also a retired consultant in palliative medicine will be on the webinar panel alongside regional Directors/Consultant for public health. To register please contact Rebecca at rebeccaJoy.novell@lancashire.gov.uk

York St John University Online Survey

We have been asked to bring to your attention another pandemic and faith-related survey, this one by York St John University. The online survey seeks to get a sense of how clergy and lay people are coping with the current lockdown and should take about 20 minutes to complete. The survey can be accessed using the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/y4fqgrzq> and results will be made available by the University in due course.

Support for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Since the pandemic began, various pieces of advice have been issued to clergy and lay leaders about supporting others as well as care for one's own mental health and general wellbeing. This has now been gathered into one section [here in the compendium](#) from where each file can be viewed and/or downloaded.

The section includes ...

- **'Covid Care'** in which Andy Meeson explores how to deal with fatigue, isolation, stress, selfishness, conflict and despondency.
- **'Creating a New Routine' in which** Susan Salt looks at ways to change your daily routine to adapt to the pandemic.
- **Mental Health Reflections from The Church of England** which includes links to other websites includes NHS guidance and the Mental Health Foundation
- **Mental Wellbeing and Coronavirus** in which Susan Salt explores how our state of wellbeing relates to the ongoing effects of the pandemic in our lives.

EIG Policy Changes

EIG has announced updates to its policies in response to the lockdown. [These can be viewed here.](#)

The Weekly Message

Archdeacon David has recorded this week's message which is available now [on the Diocesan YouTube channel](#). His theme is 'Be encouragers.'

Worship this Sunday

The Diocesan Sunday service this week is from St Christopher's Lea and Emmanuel Preston and is led by the Rev Pete Hamborg. You can watch on Sunday [via this link](#) to the Diocesan YouTube channel. It is available now for any who need access in advance.

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.

Gracious God,
as we remember before you the thousands
who have died,
surround us and all who mourn with your
strong compassion.

Be gentle with us in our grief,
protect us from despair,
and give us grace to persevere
and face the future with hope
in Jesus Christ our risen Lord.

Amen.

Yours
The Coronavirus Task Group