

Dear Friends,

Whilst we wait to see the impact of schools returning, infection rates are continuing to come down across the country and in some places the level is very low. In our own county the decline has flattened out in certain areas, especially in Preston and East Lancashire, closely related (as we have seen throughout this pandemic) to socio-economic factors and chronic poverty. We could continue to see local flare-ups in particular localities in the coming weeks and you can keep an eye on local rates [here](#).

So the message is unchanged – worship with joy but with care. It is very good news that so many of our churches will be open for public worship for Mothering Sunday this week and even better that almost all will be open by Easter. But stick to the guidance, especially around gathering, dispersal, ventilation, masks and singing.

Many of you are also managing a balancing act between public in-person worship and a continued online provision which is enabling churches to minister to many on the fringe. Advice will be forthcoming about ways in which this can be done sustainably.

Weekly Message

The Weekly Message, this week on the theme 'Writing in the Sand,' comes from Archdeacon Mark and was filmed at Whalley Abbey. It is available [here on the Diocesan YouTube channel](#).

Sunday Worship

This week's Sunday Service comes from Freedom Church on the Mereside estate in Blackpool and is led by the Blackpool Ministry Experience team. It will be available on Sunday [here on the Diocesan YouTube channel](#).

Also on Sunday the Dean and Canon Pailing will be leading a Service for Mothering Sunday from Blackburn Cathedral. You can link to that from the [Cathedral website](#).

St Cuthbert's in Preston will also be making a second appearance for this Lent season on 'Lent Worship' (which is an additional programme to the usual Songs of Praise) this Sunday morning at 11.15am on BBC One or [watch after on BBC iPlayer here](#).

Lent and Holy Week

Our Diocesan Lenten activities continue [and can be found here](#). Our Lent course, 'Looking Out in Lent,' is available there or on [the YouTube Channel](#). This week Archdeacon David considered service and next week Bishop Philip will consider then theme of justice, both drawing on the Five Marks of Mission and St Mark's Gospel.

Weddings

We have had a number of questions regarding whether weddings can take place at the moment or whether there must still be 'exceptional circumstances'. The guidance was not clear, however, we can now say that the government has confirmed that weddings can take place at the moment, with up to 6 guests and there do not need to be exceptional circumstances.

A Church Near You

A desperate plea from the Archdeacon of Blackburn. ***Please update your 'A Church Near You' website page!***

With constant changes to worship patterns in recent weeks, many pages are now out of date and now is also the time to put up details of Easter services. If you lost the contact details, don't despair! Go the bottom of your church's page, click on 'Edit this Church' and follow the instructions.

For an overview of A Church Near You, including onward links to further advice and guidance from the national church, [visit this page](#) on the Diocesan website.

Choirs and Singing

Whilst it is good that our churches are returning to public worship, we all desperately miss singing and the joyful sound of our choirs. Sadly here the news is still not good because the way in which viral particles are transmitted through the air makes singing a high risk activity. Please note the following:

- There is still no date for the return of congregational singing. This is applicable both to indoor and outdoor worship.
- Only one singer may sing at acts of public worship, or three if this is absolutely essential to the rite or act of worship. Singers should be well distanced from members of congregations, ideally behind plexi-glass.
- Choirs may not sing in public worship and should not rehearse. The earliest possible date for the return of choir rehearsals seems to be April 12th but watch this space.
- Professional musicians may rehearse and record as long as no congregation is present but must follow the [performing arts guidelines](#) closely.

We know this is depressing and Easter won't feel quite right without 'Thine be the Glory' belted out across the Diocese. But we pray that soon we will be able to open up our voice-boxes again and sing the Lord's praises heartily!

Back to School

This has been the first week back for many of our schools after a long period of time in which lessons have been delivered to pupils' homes. The sense of relief amongst many parents is almost tangible! Bishop Julian has prepared a video message for schools [which can be found here](#).

‘Leading into the Future’ webinar from CPAS

The Church Pastoral Aid Society has arranged another of its webinars, this one aimed specifically at clergy and licensed ministers and is free of charge.

'Leading into the Future 3: Five Things to Embrace' is led by James Lawrence, CPAS Leadership Principal. James will explore ways to guide leadership during the transition phase out of the pandemic. It's next Tuesday, March 16 at 10-11am or 2-3pm or there is another opportunity on Thursday, March 25 (2-3pm).

Book your place at www.cpas.org.uk/webinars and you will be sent joining details the day before your booked event.

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