

Dear Friends,

These are extremely difficult times for church leaders and we are acutely aware of the intense pressures on you all as we come to the weekend. Many people are expressing strong opinions and doing so very forcibly, but the highly complex and emotive decisions that we need to make pertain to the worship of God and so must be made calmly and peacefully. Please try to give yourself space and time to rest in Christ.

We need to bring to your attention an [open letter](#) from the Directors of Public Health for Lancashire which was made available via various social media channels and strongly advises places of worship to close during the period of the lockdown. Whilst our advice remains unchanged until next week when the Bishops nationally will be consulting with government for clarity and Bishop Julian will be in dialogue with civic and ecumenical leaders, we accept that many of you may now choose to close your churches for public worship after this coming Sunday whilst remaining open for private prayer.

Others of you will choose to continue to offer worship in churches. There are widely varying rates across the Diocese so please allow your decision to be informed by local factors such as these. You can find up to date rates in your area by inputting your post code [here](#) or check county wide figures for comparison each day [here](#).

The particular concern that lies behind this advice from Directors of Public Health is people gathering before and after worship. Churches that are offering worship on Sunday should take every possible step to ensure that people arrive and disperse safely and promptly.

We will return to this difficult area next week once national conversations have taken place. Meanwhile we will continue to support and advise all churches that make informed decisions based on risk assessments, whether that be to offer public worship or not.

We are profoundly concerned about the horrible dilemma in which clergy and lay leaders have been placed, faced with contradictory advice nationally and regionally. These are really tough times, especially for those of you new to incumbency. Please use every support network you have. Don't think twice about picking up the phone to a Bishop, an Archdeacon or an Area Dean or sending an email to coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org to set up a conversation.

The Weekly Message

Bishop Julian has recorded this week's message, a reflection on the latest lockdown, and it can be viewed [on the Diocesan YouTube page](#).

Worship this Sunday

The Diocesan Sunday service this week (the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord) will be from St Aidan's Bamber Bridge and St Leonard's Walton-le-Dale and will be led by Fr Shaun Baldwin. You can join in any time after 9am [on the Diocesan YouTube page](#). This service was recorded before the current restrictions were in place.

Choirs and Singing

There have been some questions about the advice given earlier in the week that choirs be suspended during this lockdown. This is, and remains, very strongly the view of the Task Group and no national church guidance has yet been issued. The best source of advice for guidance on this issue is the RSCM, so if you decide that singing is critical to your worship please follow closely their advice [which is here](#).

Work with Children and Young People

Whilst this area of ministry has once again had to be suspended, don't forget that there are excellent resources available via the Diocesan Board of Educations which offer Christian content to families and churches.

For children...

Bible Podlets

For parents looking for things to keep their children engaged whilst they are away from school, do tell them about Bible Podlets, our Bible study and discussion podcast for primary school aged children. There are 23 episodes to listen to and there is the option to download the accompanying discussion notes to help families participate in the games and activities that are included in each instalment. These podcasts have accumulated over 27,500 listens but many of these are outside our Diocese, so it is a great resource to share with people.

[Bible Podlets – Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education \(bdeducation.org.uk\)](http://bdeducation.org.uk)

For young people...

Catalyst is a monthly opportunity for parishes with 1-10 young people to gather, initially online and alongside their leaders, to be encouraged and inspired to grow in their faith. The next will be on Friday January 15, from 7pm-9pm. [More information and booking details can be found here](#).

For all ages...

New look Weekly@ Lectionary Resource

Our free Weekly@ Lectionary based resource has got a fresh new look and even more content for the start of the new year. We have included lots of alternative ideas and adaptations so that the resource can be used with groups meeting online, and when the time comes, in socially distanced settings. Don't forget, the materials also include an all-age talk suggestion and a 'chat and pray' sheet for each week, which can be passed on to families to support faith at home.

[Weekly@ January 2021 – Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education \(bdeducation.org.uk\)](http://bdeducation.org.uk)

For leaders...

Untapped Digital Ministry Conference – 13 February 2021

Our children's ministry conference for 2021 is fast approaching and despite the uncertainty that we're currently facing, the day seeks to be an inspiring celebration of the success stories where people have stepped out in faith and have been really creative in their practices. The conference will be delivered to you digitally for the first time and will also be free of charge, hopefully making it accessible to more people. We'd love to see as many parishes represented as possible so we can stand together and support each other in reimagining how we share the Gospel with the children in our communities.

[Children's Ministry Digital Conference – Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education \(bdeducation.org.uk\)](https://bdeducation.org.uk)

Demystifying Revelation

The Preston Deanery has organised an online morning with the Rev Dr Ian Paul on the Book of Revelation called 'Demystifying Revelation'. This will take place on Zoom on Saturday 23 January from 9:30am until about 1pm and is open to anyone in the Diocese who might be interested. For more information, or to book a place, please use this Eventbrite link [here](#).

Clayton House

Please note that the vast majority of DBF and DBE staff will be working from home during this current lockdown. However, post to Clayton House will be checked on a regular basis. Likewise staff in Bishop's House will have very limited access to the office and will be working from home (not including the Bishop!).

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.