

Dear Friends,

The mystery-strewn season of Epiphany reminds us of our call to declare the glory of God revealed in a weak and vulnerable child who was born into a fallen and damaged world. As we live with yet another wave of a pandemic that has lasted for nearly two years, your work in proclaiming the glory of Christ through worship, witness and service is of inestimable worth. Please continue to hold high the child of Bethlehem over your communities, that all might find healing and salvation in Him.

IMPORTANT - Clergy who are Isolating or have Tested Positive

Please can all clergy who have tested positive or are having to isolate email coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org. As infection rates reach unprecedented highs across the county we need to be able to monitor absences, at very least so that we can pray for and support you but also so that the bigger picture is able to be seen.

Also please ensure that the local partnerships we set up at the start of the pandemic are in place so that clergy can support each other. Area Deans should be able to offer support in this.

The Local Situation

The North West appears once again to be the epicentre of the pandemic with high infection rates across the county. This is beginning to be reflected in increased rates of hospitalisation and is placing huge pressures on NHS staff. Please:

- Keep your risk assessment up to date. There is a helpful blog link [here](#).
- Continue to work from home where possible, making alternative plans to move online what can be done in that way.
- Keep testing yourself and point your people to NHS guidance which asks us to take a lateral flow test before 'mixing with people in crowded indoor spaces'.
- keep praying for strength and resilience in NHS and care home frontline services.

Some parishes are reporting a shortage of lay leaders to run activities. Please consider suspending events for a while if it is placing too much pressure on existing teams.

Episcopal Care

Bishop Philip writes: *"We are all keeping Bishop Julian in our prayers as he awaits surgery on his back. With his absence and Bishop Jill on study leave, I am concerned that clergy may feel reluctant to flag pastoral needs or concerns. However these are hard times in which to minister and it is critical that clergy who need support or a listening ear do not hesitate to ask for it. Please continue to contact me or the Bishop's Chaplain in the usual way."*

Easter

As we have seen, infection waves cause huge problems at the time but then pass, and we must pray that Omicron is the last. It would be good to start thinking now about how Parishes can keep Holy Week and Easter, giving thanks for the God who is close to us in times of suffering and who restores all things through the glory of the Resurrection.

Coronavirus Email Address

If you have questions or problems and can't find answers on the [advice compendium](#) please email: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org.

A prayer

Father,

we thank you for your loving care and providence, although we are unworthy.

We thank you for sending your dear Son Jesus to live among us, to share in our lot and to die for all that all might live.

We ask you to look with mercy on all people throughout the world who are fearful of the threats of pestilence, war and famine in these uncertain times.

Give us the courage to overcome fear trusting in your loving plan for all people which gives us hope for the future even in the face of present adversity.

Watch over us and protect us from all harm.

We ask this in the name of Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,

Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

One God, now and forever.

Amen.