

To licensed clergy, those holding PtO and LLMs in the Diocese of Salisbury

5 June 2020 | St Boniface's Day

Dear sisters and brothers

In preparation for when we come out of lockdown, this morning a new set of documents have been published on [the CofE website](#) to which [our diocesan website](#) is linked.

They are to do with :

- small weddings,
- funerals,
- individual prayer,
- baptism,
- liturgical resources for 'Marking Our Communities.'

There has been no change in policy. The guidance is still that our church buildings remain closed to public worship and private prayer except for the incumbent (or any appointed person) and a member of their household to assist with the live streaming of worship or for the purpose of maintenance or repair. The documents do, however, give us some pointers towards the sorts of things that we will need to take into account when the government does allow places of worship to reopen.

The Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Nicholls among others made the case to government last Friday for churches to open for private prayer earlier than the date currently being advised by government, the 4th July. Despite Cardinal Nichols' excellent intervention in the media last weekend, my feeling is that our church buildings will remain closed other than as presently allowed until at least the 4th July. However, this gives us time to plan how we might re-open and, should that date be brought forward, we will be prepared.

The archdeacons are also sending [a document](#) to Churchwardens to alert them and PCCs of their responsibilities and what they will need to consider locally as we come out of Lockdown.

It is difficult to make firm plans until we know what will be allowed when the government makes that announcement. Even then there will not be one plan that fits every circumstance. A small congregation in a large building will find it easier to socially distance than a large congregation in a small building and most will fall somewhere between those poles. Suggestions from people in the diocese include:

- some sort of ticketing system where people have to book their place in church each week so that plans may be made to seat them and their household (who do not need to be socially distanced from each other);
- series of mini services so that, if the first is full, there's another one to follow;
- opening churches in a multi parish benefice on a rota system to limit the need for cleaning if the used building then remains closed for at least 72 hours; and
- opening only for limited hours during the week for private prayer.

Please do let your archdeacon know what you have in mind because we will then be able better to help each other as we share ideas and good practice.

Many of our volunteers and cleaners are over 70 and may not wish to return to the church building for the time being, especially during the summer when visitors from more highly infected areas may be visiting. They will wish to see much more stability before they congregate together again and may be unavailable for the cleaning and stewarding that you feel may be necessary. These are problems which we all face and where we need each other's help to find solutions. So, although there will be no 'one size fits all' plan, I do hope that we don't feel that it's all down to us to sort out on our own but that we do try to help each other as deaneries or in whatever grouping works for you and by feeding in to your archdeacon what are your plans so that good ideas may be more widely shared. Your archdeacons will be pleased to try to help and to talk through with you any particular problems you face. But the important thing is to have some sort of plan in mind so that, when the government does ease the lockdown, we are able to respond quickly as our communities will expect. It may be that that response will be that, in a particular setting, we do not have the resource to reopen safely for the time being even though we may be allowed to. That is a perfectly valid and prudent response and I do encourage you to make it if it applies in your setting rather than take a less well managed risk under pressure.

I am grateful to the other bishops and archdeacons for the work they are doing to keep in touch with you. I am grateful to you for the ways in which you continue to minister in such strange circumstances. A number of you are reflecting creatively on what we are learning. We learn most in difficult times. The Revd Professor Leslie Francis is [inviting us to contribute to a survey](#) he is undertaking about this. The Director of Communications will also be circulating details in *Grapevine* and *Working Together* and I encourage you to contribute as Leslie has done outstanding work over many years that has helped the Church with an evidence based analysis that has strengthened ministry and mission.

On Trinity Sunday we will affirm our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is God's ordinary time, a gift of relationship in diversity and a strength in our extraordinary times as we bind ourselves to the triune God.

+Nicholas Sarum