

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

20 May 2020 | St Alcuin's Day

Dear brothers and sisters,

First, thank you all very much for the wonderful work that you are doing in your communities throughout the diocese. Sustaining this effort is tiring, especially when one is doing so without the encouragement of normal social interaction.

Jumping out of the tree of normality was comparatively easy; climbing back into it is a much more complex process. The government is finding it hard to provide the clarity of messaging that was possible when it was a simple 'Stay at home'. Nevertheless, the dangers of Covid-19, to the over-70s and those with an underlying health condition in particular, are still very apparent. Although the number of deaths has been reducing, the dangers are still considerable.

### **Working together**

At the meeting of faith groups with the government on Friday, it was reported that the government want it to be possible for weddings to take place again, but it will not be before the 1<sup>st</sup> June and the numbers attending will be very limited. The Common Licence fee has returned to its pre-Covid level. I am very grateful to the Registry for having reduced the fee for the past few weeks to help those faced with immediate problems as the pandemic took hold. The government also want places of worship to be open for private prayer, but not before the 4<sup>th</sup> July. There is pressure for these arrangements to be brought forward and it is possible that the government's position will be revised.

The national Church is trying to keep in step with the government guidance and to issue its own advice developing the government's guidance. I too am attempting to be in touch with you when there are significant changes but synchronising with government guidance and national Church advice isn't always easy and, in any event, you will not welcome a letter from me every time there is a change. So please do continue to monitor [the Coronavirus page](#) on the diocese's website where the latest advice from the national Church is always posted.

Sometimes it is only when we try to make the advice work in a practical setting that the problems and anomalies become apparent. Please do feed back through your archdeacon any practical problems that you are facing so that together we may try to solve them. I would prefer that we move forward together on a common basis rather than have each parish make up its own 'work around'. Please also feed in plans that you may have relating to how you may start worship again when we can return to our church buildings more generally. I know that some of you already have some creative ideas that it would be good to share. Guidance on the CofE website will become more detailed as we get closer to using our buildings again.

### **Access to church buildings by an appointed individual**

Practical problems include, of course, how the incumbent of a multi-parish benefice manages to ring the bell in each of their church buildings simultaneously on a Thursday evening or what is to happen where a benefice is in vacancy or the incumbent is self-isolating or sheltering. I am, therefore, extending my advice in connection with who should have access to our church buildings.

The previous advice was that clergy could go back into church for the purposes of prayer on their

own or to film or live stream worship. I want to add that the incumbent (or the area dean where there is no incumbent) may appoint one other to enter the church building and, in the case of a benefice with more than one church building, one additional person for each church building. The appointed person should be a clergy person licensed to the benefice, a Licensed Lay Minister or a lay leader with an official role in the worshipping community (such as a PCC member). If services are being filmed or live streamed, filming should be done either with a fixed camera or by a member of the incumbent's or the appointed person's household, as applicable.

In my last letter, I suggested that clergy should feel free to ring the church bell (and in this advice I am, of course, talking of only one bell and not the whole peal) to mark the *Clap for our Carers* tributes on a Thursday evening. If the bell may be rung on those occasions, then there seems to be even more reason that it may be rung to mark when prayer is being offered in the church building or when a funeral is taking place in the churchyard, so I extend my advice accordingly to include those occasions.

I do, however, ask you, please, to follow the national Church's advice in the document [Access to church buildings during lockdown: advice for incumbents](#) regarding cleaning, record keeping, sharing of books and other materials, segregated areas etc.

A briefing paper circulated recently showed that the over-70s make up more than half of the congregation in 52% of the churches in the Diocese of Salisbury. That makes our congregations the seventh most elderly in the CofE. It's not surprising when Dorset has almost the largest proportion of elderly people of any region in Europe. It means that we need to take great care and no-one should feel that they must be the appointed person who can go into church to pray, to lead worship, to ring the bell or whatever.

### **Access to church buildings to maintain the organ**

The [national Church's advice](#) is that 'organ practice cannot be considered as essential activity under the government guidance' but

'For a cathedral or church with a larger or mechanically complex organ prolonged lack of use will result in long-term problems with its performance. If an organist is available in the neighbourhood to keep all the action parts moving it is appropriate for them to do so. The purpose of this is to run through all the stops on all keyboards, and the pedalboard to keep leatherwork from sticking and keep electrical contacts clean. Please be aware that a building in which someone who may have the coronavirus has been is considered 'dirty' (i.e. may contain infection) for 72 hours afterwards. This means multiple keyholders must not access the space, even if this is done one at a time. In any event, surfaces and door fixtures need to be sanitised in line with Public Health England guidelines.'

If your church has an instrument that needs protecting in this way, then such steps should be taken to protect it. Again, please follow the national Church's advice in the document [Access to church buildings during lockdown: advice for incumbents](#) particularly with regard to record keeping.

### **Access to church buildings by contractors**

The national Church's advice on access to buildings by building contractors has been covered to date by its document entitled [Securing and caring for your church buildings during the Covid-19 pandemic: advice for incumbents, churchwardens and PCC members](#). Broadly that advice discouraged access to our church buildings for buildings works and, in any event, urged that we follow the government's guidance. The government's ['back to work' guidelines](#) issued on Monday the 11 May apply to a number of occupations including the construction industry. They do, however, seem to anticipate construction works in the open air (for example, on a new building site) rather than repair or similar works within the more confined space of an existing building. [Two further pieces of advice](#) - *Can construction work be carried out - Please do pass on this* have just been issued by the national Church today (although they are, as I write, dated the 12 May). If,

after having studied the government's guidelines in conjunction with the national Church's advice, you feel that it may be possible to meet the stringent requirements of both, then do please liaise with your archdeacon before allowing contractors access to your church building.

### **Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD)**

Jonathan Triffitt, the Interim Director of Mission and Ministry, is developing a limited online CMD programme so do look out for when it is launched in *Working Together* and/or *Grapevine*.

### **Moving forward**

The term 'new normal' is already a cliché. We don't yet know what it will be but we are pretty confident that we will not be going back to how things were. I have been hugely impressed by the wide variety of ways in which you have continued to minister to your people, not just the live streaming or filming to which some have taken so successfully but also the less obvious but equally valuable interactions that you have been having with your communities. Thank you.

I imagine that how each of us reacts to the current crisis depends largely on our personality. Some find it almost exhilarating; others can feel overwhelmed. Both reactions and all shades in between are valid. If you are finding yourself in need of a listening ear or some counselling help, do please contact Robert Kelso (01258 881550 | [robert@kelso.org.uk](mailto:robert@kelso.org.uk)) in absolute confidence. Robert runs the diocese's **confidential care scheme** and will either give you time himself or refer you to another appropriate counsellor.

[An excellent article in The Tablet](#) last Friday included Paul Farmer's mental health tips for lockdown. It's not rocket science but was a useful check list:

**Sleep** well

**Eat** well

**Exercise** well

**Meditate** and pray well

**Identify** someone you trust who you can talk to - really talk to

**Improve** your listening skills

**Avoid** social media and too much news

**Take up** or revive a pastime or hobby

Another resource is available through St Luke's, the charity that improves clergy health and wellbeing. They have begun [a virtual wellbeing programme](#) of specifically-prepared resources to support clergy wellbeing during this time of Covid through reflection either individually or as a group.

As we do look forward, we will be celebrating the things that have gone well during this pandemic and no doubt be wondering how we may hang on to and develop them. For example, how can we maintain contact and deepen the discipleship of those who have engaged with us in worship? How can we sustain the level of pastoral care that communities have shown? What have we discovered can perhaps be let go for good? If we are to sustain ourselves and those for whom we have a care, then we cannot just take on new things; we will need to give up other things to make room. There will not be overnight easy answers to these and similar questions. The answers will come as we reflect upon and seek to discern and join in with the 'new thing' that the Lord is doing in this pandemic and beyond. We may have to experiment – but we must be prepared to stop and think again as soon as we recognise that the experiment is not working. So I do urge you to take care of yourselves, to go easy on yourselves and to be realistic about what is possible in your context. As a wise person once said, 'Remember that you cannot save the world; Jesus has already done that!'

**And finally...**

If you have not yet found them there are [good liturgical and prayer resources](#) on the CofE website.

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.**

With gratitude and God's blessing,

*+Nicholas Sarum*

PS This letter is addressed to clergy and LLMs, but please do pass on the information contained in it to churchwardens and any others to whom it is relevant.