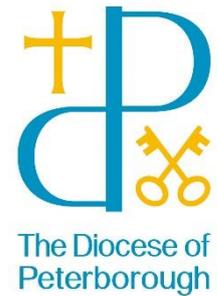


BISHOP'S BULLETIN No 11

To the Licensed Clergy of Peterborough Diocese

11 May 2020



Dear friends

Welcome to a bumper double-length bulletin for this week. I hope you've been able to take some extra time for yourself over the lockdown Bank Holiday weekend. Your well-being matters.

We have now come to the point where some of the restrictions can, very gently and tentatively, be lifted. You may have seen reports in the media of decisions made by the House of Bishops last week. Some of those reports were more accurate than others. Like many of my colleagues, I decided to consult my senior team (the Bishop's Management Group), and the Rural Deans, then to wait for the Prime Minister's announcement yesterday, before announcing any changes.

The first step

As from today, clergy or licensed lay ministers in this diocese may enter their church buildings for private prayer, or to record or livestream services. Anyone doing so must first read the document on the [Church of England Coronavirus web page](#) entitled "[Advice for Clergy on Re-entering Closed Church Buildings](#)", and follow that advice. Please note that this document will be updated from time to time, so make sure that you are using the latest online version rather than an old printout.

Only members of the minister's household may accompany him or her into the church building. This is not permission for any sort of public meeting or worship.

Please note that this is only permission. You don't have to do this. If you feel unsafe or want to wait for more people to go in with you, that is fine. If you prefer to await permission for lay people to join you for worship, that is perfectly alright too. Purely personally, I would choose that latter course, but you are free to follow your head and your heart on this.

A roadmap

Further stages of return to our buildings will follow, depending on government advice and regulations. It is likely that in a few weeks, small-scale services such as

baptisms, weddings and funerals, with family only present, will be possible. Social distancing, and strict conditions around access and cleaning, will have to apply.

Further down the line, I hope to be able to authorise Sunday worship on an appropriate scale. This will depend on how many people can conveniently be in the building with appropriate social distancing (which is likely to remain in force for months at least). Please note that it is very unlikely that we will be able to permit singing in the coming months, as the medical advice is that this would require social distancing of five metres, and that no books or service sheets can be used: these are a good way of passing germs from hand to hand.

Once there is a vaccine available to all, we will be able to return to something nearer normal, but all the advice I have seen is that sometime next year is the earliest possible time for that.

There are no timings on this plan. These will depend on government advice, on other advice I receive, and on local conditions. It is possible that relaxations to the lockdown will have to be reversed, and even new restrictions imposed, if there is a new wave of infections nationally or locally. Please be patient, and help your people to be. I want our churches open, but only when that is safe.

These steps towards re-opening will in some ways look like a postcode lottery. I regret that, but it is inevitable. Lifting a lockdown is much more complicated than imposing one. The 40 diocesan bishops of the Church of England are in close touch with each other, but each of us, with our advisers and staff teams, is responsible for making these decisions for our own diocese. We have all agreed the direction of travel, and the different steps necessary, but details and timings will vary from one diocese to another.

One example of the postcode lottery is the question of waiving funeral fees. We had authority to do that, but decided not to unless funeral services had to be shortened, which fortunately has not happened. Some of our neighbouring dioceses have waived fees. Another example is the question of furloughing. The regulations on this now allow office holders who are on time-limited contracts or agreements, to be furloughed. Some dioceses have furloughed curates, but we have decided not to.

I am well aware that as we move forward in this new world there will be a lot more discretion: for bishops and for parish clergy. That can increase freedom, but can also increase uncertainty and insecurity. Some of us will relish this, and others will be fearful. Please be assured of my support. As permissions are granted, you will be under no pressure from me or the diocese to take advantage of them. If you are in a shielded category, or vulnerable in other ways, you should work as is appropriate for you. If you and your PCC think that a largely online presence is right for your church, even if some other churches are opening more, I will support that decision. Until full re-opening is possible, things will be untidy. I understand that.

Private worship

One area which is particularly complicated, and on which I am regularly lobbied by laypeople, is the question of opening churches for private prayer. It might seem that this is a relatively easy win, but I am afraid that it is not. If churches are left open, they will need to be hygienically cleaned after each use. Remember that each person who enters the church might be a carrier of the disease, or might be particularly vulnerable to it. We are responsible for keeping our people as safe as we can, especially in our church buildings. I know that this will not be popular, but for the time being our church buildings cannot be opened for private prayer or other visits. Perhaps counterintuitively, this is likely to be the very last point on any roadmap towards re-opening.

Bishop John

Both John and Elizabeth seem to be on the road to recovery from the virus, but it is a slow road. Elizabeth is a week or two ahead. John is still showing symptoms, and becomes very tired if he tries to be active. Assuming that his recovery continues, which we pray that it will, he will be off work for another fortnight at least. Suzanne, John's PA, is dealing with his email, and Tim, my chaplain, and I, are covering as much of his work as we can.

Sunday sermons

I am very conscious of missing Sunday visits to parishes, and, in a sense, letting folk down when I have agreed to preside, preach, confirm, or simply be there with you. In normal times, I look forward very much to my Sunday visits, and to being part of a parish's life of worship and fellowship.

During this extended lockdown, I have decided to offer a Sunday sermon to any parishes or chaplaincies which want it. This will be a recording, available either as audio only or audio-visual. It will be ten to fifteen minutes long, and normally based on the lectionary Gospel. I will provide this every week, and it will be sent out by Joanne my PA to any parishes which ask. Don't ask every week, or you won't get it: the idea is not to do your work for you, but to offer the parish a change of voice, an online bishop's visit.

I'm afraid this can't be personalised to a particular parish or situation, as we anticipate that it may go to several places each week. You are welcome to put in on your website, to incorporate it into a pre-recorded streamed service, or to play it as part of a live virtual service. It will be available early in the week, to give you time to plan its use, but I ask you not to make it available until the Sunday, as others may well be using it too. In the first instance, sermons will be available for Sundays 17

May (Easter 6) to 26 July (Trinity 7). Please [email your request](#) at any time, specifying which Sunday you want a sermon for, and whether you want audio only or audio-visual.

Virtual worship after lockdown

We are all aware that, when we eventually get back into our church buildings for Sunday worship, things will be different. Many of our parishes have seen new worshippers as they have gone online, or offered “at home” services. We may well have raised expectations for the future.

Bob Jackson, a former government statistician, author on church growth, and archdeacon, has written a paper on how we might continue to use technology in the future. I attach it for those who are interested.

Bishops’ Office arrangements during lockdown

I am so grateful to the brilliant team who support me and Bishop John, and whose support during this crisis, with all the restrictions of working from home, and in a couple of cases having to be shielded, has been quite remarkable. It might be useful to give you a reminder of who is who, and how to contact us.

The Bishops’ Office is closed, with staff working from home.
Phone calls to the office will be diverted, and answered by one of the team.

All email addresses below end with @peterborough-diocese.org.uk

Bishops’ Office	01733 562492
Bishop Donald	bishop@
Bishop’s PA	joanne.gibson@
Bishop’s Chaplain	tim.albanjones@
Bishop John	bishop.brixworth@
Bishop John’s PA	suzanne.carter@
Bishops’ Office Secretary	rachel.lomas@

With love in Christ

+ Donald