



The Church of England  
**Diocese of Ely**

From the Bishop of Huntingdon  
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Dear Colleagues,

I trust you will have picked up today's letter from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York which you can find [here](#), it is also attached.

In the light of latest Government advice to cease public gatherings, the guidance from the Church of England is that *our usual pattern of Sunday services and other mid-week gatherings must be put on hold*.

Note that the key message to set alongside this is that we have NOT shut up shop but are finding new ways of being the Church of England, continuing to encourage prayer and worship at home, and serving everyone.

The Senior Leadership Team and I are working through the wide implications of all of this and this will take a while – please be patient.

Please continue to monitor the Church of England website for updates, especially the FAQ section which will be steadily updated, and [the Corona Virus page](#) on the Ely Diocesan website which we will seek to populate over the next few days and weeks with further advice and resources for virtual and home worship. Please let us know if your parish livestreams an act of worship or has any other spiritual resources so we can provide a link.

### **Church Services and Buildings**

- There will be no public worship on Sunday or weekdays.
- If at all possible, keep your churches open for private prayer.
- You may say the Daily Office in church but please keep all precautions of physical distance should anyone join in.
- if you celebrate the daily Eucharist, please be especially mindful to enforce these precautions of physical distance. Please note: please do not encourage or invite others to join you for either the Daily Office or Eucharist.
- Funerals: at this time church funerals may still take place, however, mindful of the ban on public gatherings, please discuss with the family that only the nearest and dearest may attend.
- Banns and marriage services: many couples may wish to postpone their wedding; if they wish to go ahead and they were to be married after banns, they will at the moment need a licence. Work on this is ongoing and further guidance will be issued in due course. If the marriage service is to go ahead, please advise that only a

minimal number of people may attend, that is very closest family/friends and witnesses.

- Baptisms should be postponed, unless in extremis.
- There will be no confirmation services in the foreseeable future.
- We await guidance on ordinations.
- The ban on public worship obviously affects all services in Holy Week and Easter. Further guidance will be issued nearer the time.
- Holy Oil: please be in touch if your stock of oil is running low.
- For the benefit of clarity, not gathering for public worship also means no Home Group meetings, no Children or Youth events
- We have cancelled the Big Event in the Cathedral on 13<sup>th</sup> May and will be in touch about how we will swear in Churchwardens in due course.
- ... and finally, importantly, there are various ways in which corporate prayer can continue:
  - by agreeing to pray at a certain time every day for one another and for our church, our parish, our country
  - by adding our prayers to those of others on Facebook or on a WhatsApp group – I'm sure as time goes on we shall find new and creative ways of doing this
  - by lighting a candle in your window at 7pm this coming Mothering Sunday as a sign of hope and prayer, as a witness to the light of Christ (cf the Archbishops' Letter)

## **Other events and meetings**

- Even if you are all very healthy and not at particular risk, I strongly advise you not to have Standing Committee or other leadership meetings in person but to replace these with phone/Skype/WhatsApp group calls. You may all become ill at some point but it would be really helpful for those for whom you have leadership responsibility if you did not get ill at the same time.
- no PCC or similar meetings in person – and note that these likewise can be replaced by phone or other digital media
- please await guidance concerning APCMs and the election of churchwardens/deanery reps
- note that any charity that needs an extension to their annual return deadline can contact the Charity Commission to ask for one
- The Diocesan Office is closed and staff are working from home.
- The Diocesan Bishop's Office continues to be staffed by the Revd Dr Hannah Cleugh, Senior Chaplain, and my PA Jo Godfrey and I are still in the Bishop of Huntingdon's Office.

## **Care for people**

- The [Corona Virus page](#) on the Ely Diocesan website will continue to grow with resources for virtual and at home worship.

- You might like to consider leaving material for prayer in church for people to pick up and take home. HOWEVER, there are obvious hygiene implications and every piece of paper should include the instruction such as "You are welcome to take this with you for use at home. Once you have touched this, for reasons of infection control, we must ask you to take it away with you."
- Keep in touch with people by phone or other digital means, identifying those who might particularly need your support in your parishes and neighbourhoods – share names to contact in your leadership team.
- Caring for those who are sick and dying, including those in care homes, is going to be very difficult. Please use your own judgement, following closely the advice of those health and care professionals involved, and taking all necessary precautions of protective clothing etc.
- Remember that this includes not only those who are poorly physically or mentally but also those who may lose their jobs and businesses.
- Many local foodbanks and other charities supporting our communities are feeling under considerable pressure. Please contact them and ask them which are the best ways in which you can support them. This may be by extra donations or by asking younger members of the community to volunteer, given that many Foodbank volunteers are over 70.

### **Care for yourself**

- Even if you are fit and healthy, please take all precautions. Please remember that you can be infectious without realising it, with symptoms not appearing until later. So please be cautious and reduce in-person contacts. If you begin to feel unwell, please self-isolate immediately, however much this may impede your plans.
- If you are over 70 or are aware of other health risks for yourself or anyone in your household, please know that you have our full backing for self-isolation. We do not wish to put you or your loved ones at risk. This includes that there is no expectation whatsoever on retired clergy: we do not expect you to carry on regardless.

### **Safeguarding**

- All good practice regarding safeguarding **must** be continued. Our safeguarding team continues to be available for advice and support.

### **Schools**

- While they are still open, please continue to engage as long as this poses no health risk to you or others in your household.
- When schools are closed, consider how you can work with the school to support those children who will be going without school meals.

## Finance

- Undoubtedly difficult times lie ahead for parishes and dioceses. Please continue to encourage the payment of Ministry Share. Even without Sunday worship, ministry continues, clergy and their pensions and other staff need to be paid.
- Please encourage cashless giving, either by BACS, Standing Order or the [Parish Giving Scheme](#).

## A Concluding Reflection

There are all sorts of theories around, whether conspiracy theories regarding the origin of the virus, or religious speculation on the will of God.

When we want to know how God communicates with us, we need to look to Christ. If we want to know about God's will and God's character, we need to look to Jesus Christ. When the tower of Siloam fell in Jerusalem and killed 18 people, some clearly drew the conclusion that they were punished by God. Jesus did not agree (Luke 13:4).

Jesus reveals God to us and is the prism through which read Scripture and look at our world. Yes, we meet in Jesus ultimate challenge, but also boundless grace, and certainly not vengeful punishment – which the understandable but unfortunate question 'is God punishing us' presupposes.

This Coronavirus has taken aback our breathless and global yet also highly individualized world. The crisis is bringing to the fore in a spectacular way how we are all in the same boat. This includes countries across the world but also individuals in our communities: we are all interconnected and whether we are (still) healthy, ill with the virus or particularly vulnerable to the disease, we all have an effect on one another.

It is for us to embrace this. We can have a positive effect on those around us as they can on us. So we discover in others fellow pilgrims on the way, share the hope that is within us, share material, emotional and spiritual resources, and thus share the love we receive from God that casts out fear.

We may not be able to gather together, but we can hold each other in heart and prayer, as God holds us.

The light and love of God is not defeated by darkness and death. We shall experience Holy Week and Easter in a new way this year which will strengthen and encourage us to face what lies ahead. We know it's going to be a marathon, not a sprint. And we know that as Christ goes with us all the way, we can walk the walk together, and shall yet grow in faith and hope and love, as generous and visible people of Jesus Christ.

With continued prayers and blessings, and thanks for all you do.

