



From Bishop Donald To the Clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers

*cc Bishop's Council, Diocesan and Cathedral Staff, Diocesan Registrar,
Churchwardens, Diocesan and Deanery Lay Chairs,
Yaxley Deanery Clergy and Lay Chair*

Dear friends

I'm sending a Bishop's Letter this week rather than one of my weekly coronavirus bulletins. The bulletins just go to our licensed clergy, but the letters have a wider circulation, and much of what is included this time is for lay ministers and deanery lay chairs as well as for clergy.

Visors and Facemasks

Visors? Face masks? What is the correct face covering in church? You may have seen media photos of bishops wearing clear visors (face shields) for confirmations or ordinations. A few clergy have been doing the same for communion. This has the advantage over face masks, or face coverings, that people can see your mouth and facial expressions. However, this use of visors is wrong and unhelpful.

Let's get this clear. The face shield or visor, made of transparent plastic, comes down from a headband attachment to cover the whole face. It is designed to protect the wearer from coughs or droplet spray. Its main use is in a clinical setting, where it should be worn with a face mask. It serves no useful purpose in church life: we are not ministering to those who are coughing, sneezing or spluttering. A visor does not protect other people from the wearer's breath.

The face mask or face covering is designed to cover the mouth and nose. It loops or is tied behind the ears, or at the back of the head or neck. It can be of a clinical/surgical grade, for use in healthcare or social care settings, or it can be more basic, homemade, disposable, or simply a scarf, bandana or neck buff pulled up over the face. This is designed to protect others from our breathing or occasional coughing (if we are coughing regularly we probably shouldn't be in church).

The strong advice is that face coverings should be worn in church, by both ministers and congregations, combined with hand washing and reasonable social distancing. A minister, lesson reader, or intercessor may remove the covering when speaking aloud if socially distanced (though at the eucharistic prayer the elements must remain covered if the celebrant's nose and mouth are not covered).

At the moment of ordination or confirmation, the bishop and the candidate will wear face coverings, and there will be appropriate hand washing before and after contact.

There are two exceptions. First, at the moment of receiving communion, the face covering can obviously be removed briefly; second, when people need to see our mouths in order to lip-read, the minister may, also briefly, remove the covering so that a deaf candidate or communicant can follow what is being said.

In one line: face shields are inappropriate for church, but face coverings are recommended.

Local Lockdowns

I don't want to cause alarm, but the future of coronavirus in this country is likely to be marked by local lockdowns or restrictions. The government has now given power to local authorities to do what is needed in their area, whether just to one street, one factory or one office, or to close down a whole town or borough or county. For some weeks, the City of Peterborough has been on the "hotspot" list, in danger of formal action. In the last few days, the Borough of Northampton has moved up that list and now faces strong advisory measures. I have already notified the Northampton Deanery clergy about that.

The virus has not gone away. There will be further peaks on that dreadful graph. Current government policy is to deal with this at a more local level, so it won't always be possible to have advice covering the whole diocese. If I am notified of restrictions for a particular area, I will let the relevant clergy know, but I encourage you all to be aware of current advice given by your county or city or borough council, or by the public health department, or by the county/city resilience forum. I trust the clergy, in discussion with lay leaders, to make the right call. Your bishops and archdeacons are happy to advise, and will support you if you have to make difficult or unpopular decisions.

Bishop Donald	<i>(via his PA, Joanne Gibson)</i>	e-mail Joanne
Bishop John	<i>(via his PA, Suzanne Carter)</i>	e-mail Suzanne
Tim Alban Jones	Bishop's Chaplain	e-mail Tim
Richard Ormston	Archdeacon of Northampton	e-mail Richard
Gordon Steele	Archdeacon of Oakham	e-mail Gordon

Children and Young People

The Church of England has recently published helpful guidance on mission and ministry with children and young people. This includes a flow chart and an FAQs section, to help churches feel safe with restarting their groups. You can find it under "documents" [here](#).

There are also new 'Faith at Home' resources, created to support the faith development and pastoral care of children and young people. These are aimed at church leaders, school leaders and parents. Go to [Faith at Home](#) to read more.

Senior Staff Portfolios

Most people in the diocese, and possibly most of you reading this, will be in no way affected by what appears in this section. But I'd like you to know about it, and to pray for the way we work as a diocese.

Many of you will know that I try to oversee the ministry side of the diocese (as opposed to finance, admin, housing, etc, which Andrew Roberts our Diocesan Secretary manages) by something like a cabinet system. I allocate portfolios to the senior clergy, and each of us oversees, encourages, and supports the people actually doing the work. From time to time I move the portfolios around, rather like a cabinet reshuffle, though I hope without any long (or short) knives. It is time for one of those reshuffles now. From the beginning of August, the senior staff portfolios will be as below.

+Donald Incumbents, associate priests, assistant priests
Licensed Lay Ministers
Charing the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee
(Specialist/confidential ministries, mainly *via* my Chaplain)

+John	Ordinands, curates, line managing Steve Benoy the DDO Bishop's Officer for mental health and wellbeing (assisted by Canon Tim) Children & youth (and SDF project), line managing Pete White, the Director Clergy with permission of officiate Ordained and lay chaplains Black and minority ethnic issues Environmental issues
Archdeacon Richard	Education, Chairing the DBE Line managing Peter Cantley, Director of Education Chairing Northampton Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committee
Archdeacon Gordon	Spiritual oversight of diocesan finance Chairing Oakham Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committee
Canon Tim Alban Jones	Pastoral care of clergy (includes line managing counselling and spirituality officers) Healing and Deliverance (line managing two officers) Ecumenical matters
Canon Sarah Brown	Mission; line managing Charlie Nobbs, Director of Mission Adviser in women's ministry.

Both bishops are of course available to listen to and support clergy, and are very happy to visit churches in person or online.

Bishop Donald also holds National Church and House of Lords responsibilities.

The archdeacons share in the care of the clergy. Their statutory responsibilities remain (admitting churchwardens, finance, church buildings and churchyards, clergy housing, glebe etc) and (by delegation from me) the appointments of new incumbents in their archdeaconries.

+John, Dean Chris Dalliston, Archdeacons Richard and Gordon, and Canon Tim all share in ministry reviews of clergy. +Donald is responsible for ministry review of senior clergy. The Dean looks after the residentiary canons.

Many people like headlines. I like sentences. The full-sentence headlines here could read:

- Bishop Donald will take primary responsibility for helping clergy find the way forward for their parishes post-covid.
- Bishop John will oversee our new initiative in helping clergy recognise and support mental health issues among their flocks.
- Archdeacon Richard will become Chair of the Board of Education, and oversee our schools ministry.
- Archdeacon Gordon will continue his spiritual oversight of diocesan finance.
- Canon Sarah Brown will be the strategic lead for mission in the diocese as well as the Cathedral.

Ordinations

Our ordinations are now planned for September. Under current regulations we are able to go ahead in the Cathedral, but with very limited numbers. Each candidate will be able to have

just one guest present in addition to the training incumbent. To keep numbers down, only one bishop and one archdeacon will be present at each service. I intend to ordain our new priests at 3pm on Sunday 6 September, and Bishop John will ordain the deacons at 12 noon on Saturday 26 September. Although we can't invite you to be present, I do ask you to pray for the services, and for our candidates. Those who are interested can see the talks from the online retreat, and the ordination sermons (also online and in advance to keep the services as short as possible) on my YouTube channel [here](#).

Licensed Lay Ministers

Bishop John and I are currently "visiting" churches on Sunday mornings to admit and license our newly trained Readers at Zoom gatherings.

I will license the other Lay Ministers, again by Zoom, at 3pm on Saturday 26 September, with a Zoom rehearsal a few days before. We will send them, and their incumbents, the details quite soon.

Again, please pray for those beginning new ministries in the diocese this autumn.

Ministers' Conference

I am very grateful to those who have shared your thinking on this. It has been a complicated decision for various reasons, but I have decided to postpone our conference for one year. Clergy and Lay Ministers, please cancel 9-12 November 2020 from your diaries, but make a note for 8-11 November 2021 instead. I am delighted that Yarnfield Park has agreed to hold the price we negotiated back in 2017.

Someone will tell me of the clash with Armistice Day on 11 November next year. No need: I am aware. However, this was one of only two weeks they could offer us, and the other clashed with General Synod. Much nearer the time I will be asking retired clergy, who aren't coming on the conference, to look after any war memorial commemorations on 11 November.

Cancellations

Traditionally, in the years between conferences, we have held a Clergy Day in the Cathedral in November. We cannot be sure of the coronavirus situation in November this year, but I am sure that it would be unwise to gather 160 of us indoors for the whole day. So, as I cancelled the Lay Ministers Day due in late September, I am now cancelling this year's Clergy Day. This is with much regret, but it is clearly the right thing to do.

Thank you all so much for your share in our service together for our Lord, his church, and his kingdom.

With all good wishes

+ Donald