

BISHOP'S BULLETIN No 1

To the Licensed Clergy of Peterborough Diocese

16 March 2020



Dear friends

Introduction

In these challenging times, I think we need more regular communication than my occasional letters. This bulletin is likely to appear weekly during the Covid-19 crisis, and will go to our licensed clergy (including curates, chaplains, assistant and associate priests, but not those with permission to officiate), copied to our Diocesan Secretary, our Registrar, and my office team.

It is up to you to share as much or as little as you think with your ministry team, leadership team, PCC, or worshippers – but it will appear on the diocesan website, so some of your folk may see it there. It is not confidential, but is designed for the clergy: to keep communications open and to encourage and support you. Feedback and responses are welcome. So are questions, though I can't guarantee a definitive answer every time.

New Priorities

Over the coming weeks our major responsibilities in parishes and chaplaincies will be twofold: ensuring good pastoral care for the most needy, and providing calm leadership in our communities.

It may at some stage be necessary to close Sunday services, but we are already seeing falling numbers, and that is likely to continue. We need to make sure that phone calls, emails, social media (and visits where appropriate) show people that they are still cared for and not forgotten. If at all possible we need to ensure that they can access worship online or on TV (discussions are going on with the BBC about this). As a diocese we will be helping with this, so will the national church.

We are already seeing levels of stress and panic in our population. Our own calm and non-anxious presence will be very important in the weeks to come. However busy you are, don't lose your precious time with the Lord each morning. You might even want to increase that, and maybe to share it more widely with others.

Cancellations

We all know that some larger events will need to be cancelled, and that others will become very difficult. I led a confirmation service yesterday morning, for just four young people, but I suspect that could be our last one for a while. New rules for bishops say (rightly) that we must wash our hands before confirming each candidate, which becomes impossible for larger numbers. Also, the social distancing we are going to have to learn and practise will make such services very difficult. My office will contact those with confirmations booked. If candidates are already prepared, you should tell them that they may receive holy communion pending a confirmation at some point in the future.

This means that the Easter Eve confirmation in the Cathedral will not take place this year. I am deeply sorry about that, but the risks are too great. Please pass my apologies to those who have been looking forward to this. Normal service will be resumed!

With regret, and in common with many other bishops, I am also cancelling the Maundy Thursday Chrism service. It is foolish to risk one of us inadvertently giving the virus to the rest. We will make alternative arrangements for blessing the oils, and for the re-affirmation of ordination vows, and let you know these soon.

You will want to ask about arrangements for baptisms, weddings, and funerals. I will get back to you on these as soon as I can.

Interesting Times

Prayer is vital. Please be assured of my prayers for you in these times, and please let your people, especially the most needy, know that you and the church are praying for them.

We haven't faced a crisis on this scale in this country in our lifetimes. History tells us of many, and of great work and wonderful courage from Christians at such times. Knowledge of world affairs will suggest that in this country we have been part of a cocooned minority, spared many of the difficulties which nations and churches often face. May we learn quickly to trust our Lord, to act wisely, and to lead well.

With love in Christ

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