



From Bishop Donald To the Clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers

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

Dear friends

As with my recent letters, I am sending this to churchwardens and to all clergy with permission to officiate, as well as to the usual recipients listed above. On this day, our diocesan patronal festival, it is time for another letter from me, replacing the bulletin this week. I'm not yet relegating the weekly bulletin to history, but my occasional letters have a much wider circulation, and I thought that necessary at this stage in the coronavirus saga.

Re-opening Church Buildings

For some this is a moment of rejoicing. Others are afraid. In between are those who realise that there is some seriously hard work ahead. The government and the media sometimes present this as straightforward. In fact, it is very complicated. Churches may re-start public worship from this coming weekend, but under quite stringent conditions. Detailed government guidance, promised last week, has still not appeared, and the church guidance, when we issue it, must take that into account. The guidance you need will be among the documents on the Church of England [Coronavirus web pages](#) as soon as possible.

Here are some highlights of what I expect to be included.

- A record should be kept of who is present, with their contact details;
- It is not permitted to shake hands, or to touch in any other way;
- No books or papers are to be given out;
- Soft furnishings, such as kneelers and pew runners, should be removed;
- Toilets should not be made available, except for emergencies;
- People, other than members of the same household, should if possible stay two metres apart, or at least one metre apart wearing face coverings;
- Face coverings are recommended, but not required unless within two metres;
- Singing is not allowed, except for one cantor if wished, well distanced from everyone else (this is the subject of current research, and the guidance may change later this summer);
- Communion is permitted, but the celebrant's face must be covered during the communion prayer and the distribution, hand hygiene must be observed, the bread of communion must be placed on the recipient's hands (stretched well away from the body), the priest but nobody else may receive the wine;
- The service should be as short as reasonably possible (aim for 40 minutes at most);
- No refreshments may be served, and people should be encouraged to leave the building promptly at the end of the service.

There is no compulsion to rush back to church, and nobody who is shielding, even clergy, should come back until shielding ceases in August at the very earliest. It may take time to make the necessary arrangements for re-opening: that is fine. Re-opening may prove particularly difficult for some churches, for a variety of reasons. I understand this. It would be perfectly acceptable to decide just to open one church in each benefice for the time being, to help people get used to the new arrangements.

I think it particularly important not to lose real benefits that have been gained during lockdown: new aspects of community service and contacts, new or returned worshippers through online services, greater depth and openness of fellowship as a result of zoom or similar “coffee times”. Take your time to think and pray this through. Where should your energies now be focussed? What priorities might need to change?

My senior staff are very happy to discuss these matters with you.

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

Church Weddings

These are now permitted, with a maximum attendance of 30 people. Again, the guidance is among the documents [here](#). If public worship resumes, you can call banns, but otherwise weddings will need to be by common licence. Normally this is available through your deanery surrogate, but full details are [here](#).

Youth activities

Most youth work has been on hold recently, with limited material online. Good advice from the National Youth Agency about supporting young people on the journey out of lockdown is available [here](#).

Ordinations – Petertide/Michaelmas

Today is St Peter’s Day, and normally our ordinations would have taken place yesterday, on the nearest Sunday. Over the last few days we have held an “online retreat” for our eight priest-candidates and eleven deacon-candidates. Government regulations permitting, we hope to ordain the priests in early September, and the deacons around Michaelmas (late September). In the meantime, I have authorised the deacon-candidates to begin their new parish ministry as lay people. Please pray for those whose ordination has been delayed – and that we might find the best way to ordain them before too long.

Church of England National Service – 5 July

You may be aware that the Church of England has produced a national service online every Sunday during lockdown, attracting a lot of people who aren’t regular churchgoers, or whose church is not working online. I haven’t normally advertised these, as I hope that those in this diocese who can go online will find what they need more locally. However, next Sunday’s offering is prison based, and was produced from Stocken Prison in our diocese. If you would like to watch it (I certainly will), you can find it [here](#) from 9.00am next Sunday. Like the other services, it will remain available at the same address for the foreseeable future.

Licensed Lay Ministers – September

We had booked Saturday 26 September for our annual Celebration of Lay Ministry at the Cathedral, to include worship, teaching, fellowship, and the licensing of new lay ministers after their two-year course. It is extremely unlikely that we could hold an event for up to 200 people in September, so with great regret I have cancelled that all-day celebration.

However, we can still go ahead with the licensing, as this (unlike ordinations) can legally be done online. We shall be inviting those to be licensed, together with their incumbents and possibly one or two supporters each, to join in a licensing event by zoom, probably late afternoon that day.

Ministers' Conference – November

We still have the Yarnfield Park conference centre booked for 9-12 November, for our three-yearly conference for licensed clergy and lay ministers. The last three conferences have been wonderful occasions of teaching, worship, fellowship, and growing together. We, and possibly the centre, will have to make decisions nearer the time. Conference centres are not re-opening alongside hotels in July, but hope for government permission to do so in August. Given the numbers we usually take, we could not comply with the current social distancing guidance in the main conference hall or the dining room. At this stage it would be useful to know how the clergy and lay ministers feel about the conference. If you have any strong feelings, about the event or your participation, please drop Joanne Gibson my PA [an e-mail](#).

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

With all good wishes

+ Donald