

BISHOP'S BULLETIN No 39

To the Licensed Clergy of Peterborough Diocese

21 February 2021



Dear friends

Alarums and Excursions

Leaks of government discussions have proliferated during the covid crisis. Some may be a deliberate softening up, or a testing of the waters, some may be malicious, some may be media guesswork, or putting two and two together to make seventeen. But we do know that there will be a “Roadmap” this week, almost certainly tomorrow. We are pretty sure that at least some children will go back to school on 8 March. Other hints have been dropped, leaks have sprung, and alarums and excursions are all around us. Let’s wait and see: in much prayer for our government and nation, for those who have lost loved ones, for those currently ill or dying, for those whose mental or physical health has been permanently damaged; and in much gratitude for all who have gone way beyond their normal duties to serve us all.

Of course, the virus hasn’t gone away. New strains and variants will continue to emerge. We will see more tragic loss and more long-lasting damage. We will have very difficult decisions to make about the speed and the details of our emergence from lockdown. I’m sure you know that you will have my full support as you and your PCCs make and implement those decisions.

You don’t need my permission to resume worship in the church building, but I would be grateful if you could let me know, via [Joanne Gibson](#), when you are re-opening. A reminder that you have my permission to suspend public worship as long as we are in lockdown, Tier 4 or Tier 3: though we don’t even know whether we will emerge into tiers, or into something new. As things become clearer, I will spell out what that means for us, but I suspect that each parish will have to make its own decisions.

The Cost of Covid

The horrendous death toll, still rising even though more slowly, is just part of the cost of the pandemic. Jobs lost, financial ruin for people and businesses, children missing out on schooling and socialising, families and friends separated, mental health issues soaring, and the horrors of “long covid” (now more accurately called post-covid syndrome) add up to much brokenness of individuals, relationships, and society.

Lifting the lockdown, whether that is gradual or sudden, won’t solve those issues. We will have to live with them, as we’ll have to live with the virus. Yes, there have been benefits:

a move away from the drudge of a daily commute for many, a discovery of the possibilities of video calling to family and friends as well as for work, leaps in scientific understanding of epidemiology and vaccines, respect and gratitude for workers and jobs previously taken for granted. We can come out of this a better society. But we will have to pay greater attention to caring for one another, to being a more gentle people.

Funerals

I am very aware that some parishes are still bearing a heavy load of funerals. That is something we ought to be able to share with one another, particularly within a deanery. If you are finding that a burden, don't be afraid to ask neighbouring clergy, or to send a message to your chapter asking for help. And, if you are in a position to help, please offer to do so.

23 March 2020

That was the day when the Prime Minister announced the first lockdown, including the closure of churches. There is talk of holding a national covid memorial that day each year. I don't know what might happen this year, but you might want to pencil the date into your diary just in case.

The Lenten Collect

I was brought up on the Book of Common Prayer, and still love its language and its rhythms, though I do believe (as the 39 Articles tell us) that for public worship we must use "language understood of the people", and that regular revision of liturgy is important. Both the Alternative Service Book, and (to a much greater extent) Common Worship, have brought new light and good things to our public and private praying. To my mind, though, we have lost a powerful aspect of Prayer Book praying, and I encourage you to reclaim it.

The Ash Wednesday Collect was to be used every day in Lent following the collect for the day. The same applied in Advent, with a collect repeated daily. Those two prayers are stunningly good, and they helped to define and shape the spirituality of a season. The Common Worship rubrics allow them to be used instead of the post-communion prayer during the season, but that is just an option, and it only applies at Communion, not at Morning and Evening Prayer.

By all means, if you can see value in this, join me in using the Ash Wednesday Collect daily in Lent, whichever version of Morning or Evening Prayer you use.

With love in Christ

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