

BISHOP'S BULLETIN No 4

To the Licensed Clergy of Peterborough Diocese

27 March 2020



Dear friends

Warm greetings to you all. You are probably aware that a number of our clergy are already ill with covid-19, or have family members ill. We wish them well in particular, as we continue to pray for each other, and to encourage one another to stay safe.

Discretion

I have been asked a number of times about apparently conflicting advice from a number of sources, in particular two different government papers which permit one member of the clergy to enter a church building to pray or to stream a service, and allow small-scale funerals in church buildings.

These are permitted as discretionary departures from the strong general advice that church buildings should be shut, and that we should all “Stay Home; Save Lives”. You may have heard the Chief Medical Officer urging us to “avoid anything that is in any way discretionary”. That is my strong advice too. These possible uses of church buildings are not part of the official exceptions laid out by the Prime Minister: exercise, necessary shopping, care for the vulnerable. They are not necessary, as the official exceptions are.

There is always a tendency to look and press for loopholes, and some government advice, not always cleared by the highest levels of government, reflects the pressure that lower levels of government feel under to appear reasonable. It does not always or necessarily reflect the very best that we can do. To save lives we should stay home. For me the only exceptions should be based on absolute necessity.

We simply do not have the resources to disinfect our church buildings after each use, or to stop larger numbers turning up for a funeral. Discretionary uses are permitted, but in my view are very unwise. Much better that we set an example of staying within government advice, rather than stretching boundaries.

Later today you should receive another letter from the Archbishops and Diocesan Bishops: we have a zoom meeting late morning today. I expect that will give much the same advice as I am doing here. The situation is fast-moving, and conflicting advice will appear from time to time. You must be wise, and do what is right.

Future Plans

It is distinctly possible that we will be looking for volunteers to do shifts of crematorium duty. Please consider whether you would feel able to do that if asked.

We are likely to be waiving all funeral fees during this crisis. This will mean a loss to some PCCs, and some retired clergy, and a much bigger loss to the diocese. However, I think that is much better than our making a profit out of such a dreadful situation. There will be much to sort out after all this

New orders of service for crematorium and graveside services are being sent out soon. These are predicated on the likelihood that the length of such services may be reduced to ten minutes. Please use them if you need to, though we all hope that things won't get that extreme. There will also be a helpful leaflet to help those who can't be at a loved one's funeral. Please make good use of that.

Clergy moves are mainly on hold, not least because removal firms are not working, and there is a real question about this summer's ordinations. We will see to it that nobody loses out financially through this. More details to follow.

Sunday Services

Not everyone can stream services, and not everyone can receive streamed material. For those who can, streaming is very good: probably not always live, as we can do better by inserting clips of readers, music and so on. For those who cannot, prayer booklets or leaflets can be used, and pointing people to televised worship, and simply old-fashioned phone calls including a Bible reading and a prayer.

Let's each do what we can, within our own abilities, and knowing our own people. We are not in this to be competitive, or to provide the best hi-tech offering. We are here to help our folk relate to our Father God, through his Son, in the power of the Spirit. We are here to hold them as part of mother Church. We are here to lead our churches in caring for their communities in Christ's name. We will all do that differently (as we always have). Bless you for all you do.

With love in Christ

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