

Armagh Diocesan Response Guidance

Updated guidance in red

A Message from the Bishop

“When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him ‘Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews with her weeping also, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved... And Jesus began crying.”

John 11:32-35

Gospel for Passion Sunday

It should now be very clear that this is going to be a bit of a marathon rather than a sprint, and that things are going to get worse before they get better. As people of faith, who place our trust in a God of holy love, we have a part to play in being bearers of hope (the least spoken about of the “theological virtues”).

“God so loved the world.” The supreme expression of that love is what we will be thinking about on Good Friday. But it is not the sole expression of God’s love. His continuing care of the world and its people is also there and we are to try to be agents of reassurance and hope. Not glibly, as though faith is a magic wand, but by sharing in the experience of others in human solidarity.

People’s lives have changed in ways that couldn't have been imagined just a fortnight ago. Door handles and counter tops have become objects of suspicion. We watch anxiously over our families, especially those who have an underlying illness. Everyone looks round and adds an inch to their step when someone coughs.

As mortality rates rise and as our freedoms are further taken from us, it will be easy to think that things are out of control. They aren’t.

Most of us are well and will stay well. “Together” we can beat this horrible little pathogen. Unity can triumph over fear. As I saw written somewhere recently, it is “literally” in our hands. So wash them well, and raise them up to God in the confidence of prayer. Pray without ceasing as the Apostle says.

Pray for all those who are frightened; all those who are ill; all those small businesses and sole traders who hardly know what the future will look like. Pray for the Executive in NI and the Government in the Republic. Above all

pray for all healthcare workers who are the heroes, not of the hour, but of the long battle against Covid-19.

Holy Week

I will be recording three reflections for the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week. I will also record one for Good Friday. These will be available on the Diocesan Facebook page and Diocesan website www.armagh.anglican.org

I have asked that each parish or group of parishes does something individually for Maundy Thursday, by way of a celebration of Holy Communion.

I am planning also to record a service of Holy Communion for Easter Sunday with recorded music which will also be available on the Diocesan Facebook page and Diocesan website. The service will also be broadcast at 9.00pm on Easter Sunday on *Northern Sound 96.8 FM* and *Shannonside 104.1 FM*.

Finally, please try to keep safe. Do what you can when you can and for whom you can but follow the guidelines which are designed to ensure that the fewest number of people contract this disease. Don't be glued to social media or let it dictate your mood. Most of us are lucky enough in this part of the world to be able to go for a walk through nature. Distract one another. Listen to inspirational music. Listen for the whisper of God in it all.

+John Clogher

This is a time of great challenge for the church, but also a time for the Christian Church to demonstrate a spirit of generosity and help to those in need. You will probably find a great desire from parishioners to get involved in this effort and all offers should be utilised as far as possible.

1. Public Worship

Services – All public acts of worship should have ceased until further notice. Church buildings should not be open to the public, **this includes funerals.**

Online Media – Clergy broadcasting services online should consider doing so from the Church or their home. Should the broadcast take place from the church, physical distancing should apply, hygiene guidance should be observed and no more than 2 people should be present in the church for the broadcast.

Previous videos streamed online for worshipping from home are available online at <http://www.armagh.anglican.org/MonthlyFocus.html>

Many parishes have already initiated such initiatives. If your parish coordinates worship resources that can be accessed online, please inform the Diocesan Communications Officer so that information of such can be circulated. Guidance for preparing online services is available at https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/9485/covid19-guidance-for-online-services?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=church%20of%20ireland

Innovate – Many clergy and parishes are already implementing alternative ways to offer worship and spiritual support to individuals and their community, those who have not are encouraged to consider doing so. Anxiety levels will rise and people will be looking for spiritual resources accessible at home to help them. Parishes should already be giving consideration to the preparation of resources for parishioners, including those without Internet access.

Daily prayers - Daily prayers can help give structure to our days for those who are housebound with more time for thinking and reflecting. You may wish to consider signposting people to the online resources at <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/prayer-worship/book-of-common-prayer/2004-texts/texts> and to produce local booklets to offer as *personal copies only* (please do not pass these around).

Prayer times – Parishes could consider setting up regular prayer times which people can join remotely rather than in person, using the church bell to sound the times of prayer, in addition to online conferencing facilities such as Skype, Facetime, Zoom, telephone prayer partners, in order to positively help establish a sense of corporate prayer and the strengthening of the praying community.

All Christians from across the whole Church are invited to join in prayer on Palm Sunday, 5 April, from 3pm to 4pm - remembering that we should only gather to pray within their own households.

2. Pastoral Care

Clergy, Lay Readers and Diocesan Pastoral Assistants – The health and well-being of parish and diocesan clergy together with support staff and volunteers is of paramount importance, both for their own protection and for those they minister to. Those with underlying health conditions, those that develop symptoms, and those over 70 years of age should adhere to

government guidance concerning self-isolation and should inform a neighboring member of the clergy or supervising member of clergy of their availability / unavailability in order to enable the continuation of pastoral ministry in the parish. Clergy are reminded to co-ordinate the provision of pastoral care in their parishes in cooperation with neighbouring clergy.

Home Communions – All Home Communions should have ceased by now until further notice.

Visitation Protocols – All pastoral visitations should have ceased by now until further notice. Instead Clergy and/or Diocesan Pastoral Assistants should contact those needing pastoral care in parishes by telephoning them. The hospital chaplains are no longer permitted to carry out hospital visits unless expressly invited to do so by hospital staff. Clergy who are asked to visit parishioners in hospital or residential care should only do so if permitted by the hospital/residential facility and with the consent of the individual's family. Hygiene and physical distancing measures must be observed.

Pastoral and practical support - Develop a plan for the pastoral and practical support of those who are vulnerable or housebound in the parish (the plan must of course adhere to safeguarding policies and hygiene practices). Consider developing a 'Love thy Neighbour' scheme for those in self-isolation with a team of volunteers to: Regularly contact by phone to alleviate loneliness; Report concerns as to their health; Collect urgent supplies & shopping; Post mail, etc. You may want to consider offering to hold next of kin details for parishioners who live alone, but make sure any such personal information is stored securely and you have the individual's permission to have these details in keeping with General Data Protection regulations. Identify and brief lay people who can provide telephone support and prayer for those who are fearful or otherwise distressed.

Self-isolated - For those who need to self-isolate, consider how people can be supported with phone calls and via social media, and help with the delivery of shopping and / or medication. It is very important that all church members involved in such support are very clear on and committed to adhering to the Government's isolation and general hygiene advice.

Weddings – Weddings should no longer take place until further notice.

Funerals – **Funerals should no longer take place in Church buildings until further notice.** In many parts of this country we have come to expect that a funeral service with burial/cremation will normally take place around the third

day after death. With the evolving coronavirus crisis that may not be possible, especially if there are numerous deaths and the authorities come under severe pressure. Members of the clergy can continue to perform funeral liturgies and services **at the graveside and where possible outdoors at the home of the deceased** as soon as legally and practically possible, working with funeral directors and others as appropriate, strictly adhering to hygiene advice and physical distancing measures.

Funerals should be attended by family members only **up to a maximum of 10** in order to keep numbers in attendance low, it is strongly advisable that funeral arrangements (*time, date, venue*) are not publicly advertised in order to avoid large gatherings. Clergy should not visit the home of the deceased or the homes of the bereaved family other than **to conduct a short funeral liturgy or service where possible outdoors at the home of the deceased**. Funeral arrangements should be made by phone and/or email. Arrangements should at all times comply with physical distancing measures.

There should be no congregational singing, however background music could be offered where feasible. Hygiene advice and physical distancing should be strictly adhered to, physical contact including handshaking, and funeral teas should not take place.

Copies of prayers for the sick and the dying and also a copy of the funeral service could be helpfully sent to those unable to attend the funeral of a friend or relative, as could an audio or video recording of the service where this is possible.

The option of holding a Thanksgiving Service, to take place at a future date when possible, should be offered to bereaved families.

This information has been issued by the diocese to a number of undertakers, however some may have been overlooked, therefore it is important to refer local undertakers active in your parochial area to these guidelines.

Mental Health and Hardship – Efforts should be made to support those who may be struggling with mental health issues and/or hardship. It will be important to take measures, such as regular phone communication, to help alleviate loneliness and despair.

3. Community Response

Volunteer Mobilisation – In time volunteer support may be necessary for medical staff and for individuals in the community. Churches are well placed to channel information, particularly on requests for volunteers. Information will be circulated to clergy and parishes when available.

Public Reassurance – Clergy can offer important public reassurance through “the sacrament of presence” and being seen to be “present” and available. This does not include physically visiting those diagnosed with COVID-19 or those who are self-isolating: clergy need to protect themselves and others, making sure they adhere to physical distancing and hygiene precautions. Clergy can also be a trusted voice in a community and help with the distribution of government advice ensuring isolated members of the community are aware of the precautions they can take. Network as appropriate with local health, welfare, safety networks, funeral directors and other service providers. Ensure contact details for these service providers are held by key parish leadership. Be aware of local information and peculiarities eg changes in public utilities or services that affect your community specifically.

4. Parish Administration

Premises - All public parish premises, **including churchyards and graveyards**, should be closed by now until further notice, this includes Churches and Church Halls. Church buildings should not be open to the public for private prayer and reflection in order to avoid unintentional gathering of people. In due course there may be need for church premises to be made available for civic response purposes, these can be considered compassionately as they arise.

Easter Vestries – All Easter Vestry meetings should be deferred until further notice and existing officers should remain in post until circumstances allow.

Select Vestries – All Select Vestry meetings should be deferred until further notice. Matters requiring urgent consideration by a Select Vestry should be considered using electronic means such as teleconferencing, email circulation.

Parish Organisations – All parish organisations should by now be cancelled until further notice.

Charity Returns and Annual Accounts – The charities regulators in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have both confirmed that organisations should follow government advice and that organisations will not be considered

to be in contravention of the Act in this respect. Further information is available at <https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/news/covid-19-coronavirus-information/>

<https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/en/information-for-charities/coronavirus-covid-19-and-charities>

Continuation of Ministry – A template document to facilitate the continuation of ministry in parishes has been circulated to clergy. **Parishes that have not prepared and submitted these are asked to do so.**

5. Diocesan Office

The Diocesan Office is closed until further notice. **Mail will be received intermittently.** Staff can be contacted by email or by telephoning the **Diocesan Office – 028 37522858** There is an answerphone service on this line and messages will be picked up daily.

- Diocesan Secretary – secretary@armagh.anglican.org
- Admin Assistant – office@armagh.anglican.org
- Archbishop's Secretary – abpsecretary@armagh.anglican.org
- Safeguarding Officer – safeguardingtrustarmagh@gmail.com
- Youth Officer – doycarmagh@gmail.com
- Communications Officer – dco@armagh.anglican.org
- Diocesan Architect – office@leightonjohnston.com

6. Communications

Diocesan Magazine – We did print these for April/May. However we have decided we cannot permit these to be distributed in the current climate. An online pdf version will be made available in the coming days.

As regards future editions, we will keep this under review.

Information and Guidance – The diocesan website will be used as the principle point of communication to provide regular updates for parishes and the general public. Information will also be made available through the diocesan Facebook page and through press releases. Information particularly for the attention of parishes and clergy will be circulated via email.

Reaching out – Parishes, with their own websites and Facebook pages and those without these are welcome to use the Diocesan Website and Facebook

Page to communicate the latest advice to parishioners and worshippers. Please email dco@armagh.anglican.org with information.

7. Diocesan Diary

All diocesan meetings and training events have been cancelled until further notice.

8. A Call to Pray on Palm Sunday

Church Leaders encourage the community and call Ireland to pray.

In these days when we can no longer gather and 'be church' in the traditional way, the call to live out the Gospel as agents of God's mercy and compassion through the sacrifices that we make to protect the vulnerable, and by finding new ways to be Good Samaritans and good neighbours is as powerful as ever.

To all who are suffering, have lost loved ones and are anxious in these unprecedented days, we pray that you may find strength and comfort in the loving presence of Christ who promised to be with his people always (*Matthew 28:20*).

As Church Leaders, we want to thank everyone in our health and social care services and those working on the frontline, for their courage as they work selflessly to minimise the suffering caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Alongside our chaplains and pastoral teams, they have chosen to walk towards the danger for our sake. We owe it to them to play our part in limiting the spread of this virus by staying home and practising social distancing when we need to go out.

With this crisis has come a heightened awareness of our interconnectedness and interdependency and a new recognition of the vast array of jobs that are essential to the functioning of our society. All our workers, whether called into service at this time, or asked to stay home, need to be adequately protected.

In the midst of this suffering, however we can see many signs of hope. The speed with which local communities, involving churches, community groups, charities, businesses and other local community leaders, who have mobilised in response to this unprecedented challenge, has been a great reassurance to many.

We still have a long way to go in the fight against Covid-19 and its consequences. We will need many volunteers for our health service and to protect the vulnerable. Charities that provide much-needed support, also need donations, so please consider giving online. We are all called to make sacrifices, but the burden of suffering will not be evenly shared.

In a short space of time the rhythm and pattern of our everyday lives has changed. There is however one constant throughout – an ever-loving God who tells us, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (*Isaiah 41:10*).

As we look to Him with our pastoral and practical concerns during these unparalleled times, as the island battles this pandemic, standing alongside other denominations and Christian organisations, we are today issuing a call to pray.

As Christians, we believe that prayer sustains our life as followers of Christ. In the midst of this global pandemic, we turn to Jesus in our time of need. As Church leaders, we join together in calling all our people to pray. **We invite all Christians from across the whole Church to join in prayer on Palm Sunday, 5 April, from 3pm to 4pm - remembering that we should only gather to pray within their own households**, in line with government advice.

God loves the world and everyone in it. We will pray for those who are sick, and those feeling fearful; we will pray for those who have been bereaved and those who are isolated and alone. We will pray for our healthcare professionals, delivery drivers, essential workers and all who continue to work on the frontline. We will pray for, and with those in our communities, who are fearful about their employment and providing food and shelter. We will pray for our families and friends, neighbours and civic, business and political leaders for the inevitable challenges that will arise in the coming days.

Though we cannot meet as the gathered Church, we will end the hour united on our knees in prayer, asking for the Lord’s healing touch on our land and all its people. All are invited to pray, regardless of where they are in their own journey of faith, even if they have never prayed before. At this critical moment we will bring this land before our loving God in prayer remembering that, “We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy” (*Daniel 9:18*).