

CORONA VIRUS (COVID -19) Update 16nd April 2020

Armagh Diocesan Response Guidance

Updated guidance in red

A Message from Archbishop – elect John

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Jesus Christ is risen; Alleluia!

The first thing I want to do is to thank all those who helped everyone in the Diocese to celebrate Easter (the greatest of all the Christian Festivals) online and in a joyful way. There was certainly a good variety of services, all well produced and spiritually helpful. Holy Week too was marked fittingly in many places. Clearly the online training courses which the Diocesan Communications Officer, Brian Donaldson organised, paid off. We will be organising these again soon, so that all clergy and their named substitutes will be able to deliver online worship, no matter how modest it may be.

Both liturgically and in society we are now entering a quieter period. However it is a crucial period, not only in the campaign against Covid-19, but also in the domestic and spiritual lives of many people. There may be less need for online Services (although hopefully many people will still provide Sunday worship) but there is an increased need for meaningful pastoral contact.

Many of us are already feeling the strain of being restricted in our movements and especially those who are self-isolating not to mention families with energetic young children who are living in very small living spaces, perhaps without a garden. I think these needs should be our priority over the coming weeks, through to Ascensiontide. So, please make sure that you are keeping in contact with people who you know are in isolation and that they are getting essential material and spiritual food.

I would ask you also to think especially of those who are not online. There will be quite a number in that category and I would suggest that clergy and/or others might consider

sending them old fashioned letters by post, so that people don't feel left out or neglected. You may well be able to think of, or have, other ways of keeping in touch. I do hope so.

This is also a time of great strain for the farming community. Many of us will have seen the fields around us fill with ewes and their newborn lambs; always a life enhancing sight in the season when we talk about Jesus Christ the Pascal Lamb and also the Great Shepherd of the sheep. But as you know the marts are closed and milk prices are also poor. The resulting anxiety and uncertainty can have an effect on people's mental health, so there's a link on the website at the end of where this pastoral letter will be, which will take you to a couple of very helpful short pieces written by Raymond Farrell, who is a mental health practitioner. Pray for our farmers just as you continue to pray for healthcare workers.

Funerals

The other group of people who are being very deeply affected by the current restrictions are bereaved families. With churches closed and graveside numbers restricted to ten at present, but going down to six for Covid related committals, and only lasting fifteen minutes, the funeral cannot be as spiritually or emotionally as helpful as we would usually provide.

But please make it as full and comforting as possible. Feel free to provide family members with copies of the Shortened Funeral Service which was circulated about a fortnight ago, perhaps personalised by at least adding the name and dates of the deceased. Continue to involve the family in the Scripture readings or in some other small ways. And of course give the reassurance that a full service of thanksgiving for the life of the loved one can be organised at a future date.

Above all else, clergy or lay people I hope that God will give us the strength and the wisdom to fulfil our vocation as those called to be salt and light in our communities, especially at this critical time.

+John Clogher

Link to helpful pieces regarding mental health:

www.clogher.anglican.org/docs/copingwithchange

www.clogher.anglican.org/docs/worry

www.clogher.anglican.org/docs/fear

This message from the Bishop can also be found as a video at

<https://www.facebook.com/clogher.diocese/videos/24957674285531>

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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.

Forthcoming broadcasts for worshipping from home are available online at <http://www.clogher.anglican.org/Diary/> Previous videos streamed online for worshipping from home are available online at <http://www.clogher.anglican.org/Videos/> Many parishes have already initiated such initiatives. If your parish co-ordinates 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.

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 neighbouring 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.

<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/parish-resources/609/guidance-in-respect-of-possible#section-609>

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.

RCB Guidance available online

<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/resources/?query=&categories=120>

- Practical steps for Parish Treasurers and Select Vestries
<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Resources/ParishResources/COVID19/ParishTreasurersPracticalSteps.pdf> (*The Diocese will communicate with parishes once action needs to be taken concerning Easter Vestry meetings*)
- Covid-19 Supports from the Irish Government
<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Resources/ParishResources/COVID19/IrishGvtSupportCovid-19.pdf>
- Covid-19 Supports from the UK Government
<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Resources/ParishResources/COVID19/UKGvtSupportsCovid-19.pdf>
- Covid-19 Insurance Considerations
<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Resources/ParishResources/COVID19/InsGuides-COVID-19.pdf>
- Guidance for the temporary closure of church buildings during Covid-19 Pandemic
<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Resources/ParishResources/COVID19/TempClosureBuildings-COVID19.pdf>

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 – safeguardingarmagh@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. Clergy resident in the Republic of Ireland In the Republic of Ireland regulations have been brought into force by the Minister for Health. It is important and should be noted and acted upon. The key provision is that '...a person shall not leave his or her place of residence without reasonable excuse.' These regulations affect the generality of our lives as citizens of the State in which respects clergy are no different from other citizens. Clergy are no longer listed in a general way as 'an essential service'. This is significant in that there is no longer a general exemption given to clergy on the basis of being 'an essential service' except insofar as they may be included in a 'funeral, burial and related services'; but that is not stated explicitly. It is clear, therefore, that no clergy may leave their place of residence, *qua* clergy, other than for the purposes of fulfilling these aspects of ministry set out in the regulation. The leading of worship etc

is through the use of technology etc only. This does not include gathering for worship in a place. All other elements of public health guidance and restrictions on gatherings and numbers continue to apply. The guidance previously given that no clergy should visit homes where there is an actual or suspect diagnosis of COVID-19 therefore remains and Public health advice must be followed.