



## Diocese of Exeter

### **Coronavirus - frequently asked questions**

**Updated 19.3.20**

#### **Pastoral Care**

The pastoral care of the clergy and Readers is vital at this time of national crisis. Please make sure you look after yourselves and your family. If you have any symptoms please make sure you self-isolate as per the Government Advice. **If you do need to self-isolate please inform your Rural Dean and Archdeacon.**

Please make sure you keep in touch with your Chapter colleagues, perhaps having regular phone contact, or virtual meetings using platforms such as <https://zoom.us/>

We are in the middle of unprecedented times for our country and our churches and the communities in which they serve. The most important thing to remember is that our churches are open for prayer, and that we need to remember to love our neighbour and to do everything that we can to avoid the spread of the virus.

#### **Clergy and Readers over 70**

Clergy and Readers who are 70 or older or who are otherwise at risk should follow government social-distancing advice at this time. Clergy with oversight of parishes should not invite clergy with PtO or Readers who are 70 or older to officiate or minister pastorally.

Beneficed / licensed clergy who are 70 or older should consult their Suffragan Bishop.

#### **Church Services / Worship**

Public worship will remain suspended until the Archbishops have reinstated it once the present phase of the Coronavirus crisis has come to an end.

Church buildings should remain open wherever possible for private prayer and reflection.

Clergy may say daily prayer or celebrate Holy Communion (with one person present) in church. They may wish to tell their congregations that they are doing so at a particular time, so that people can pray at the same time in their own home. They should actively discourage people from joining them in person in church for that time of prayer.

Everyone for whom it is safe to do is welcome to come to open churches for private prayer, while maintaining social distancing and good hygiene practices.

Please think of creative ways you can encourage people to pray at home, e.g. -

Clergy / lay ministers praying in church at a set time on a Sunday, inviting others to follow the same service at home, perhaps using an online resource so that all may join in the prayers and readings.

Video recording reflective services and circulating an online link.

Live-streaming an act of worship if you have the technology to do so, led by an ordained or lay minister with no more than one other person present to say the responses. (If music is included, care should be taken to comply with copyright restrictions where the church does not have an appropriate licence: see <https://www.prsformusic.com/>)

See the Diocesan website LINK for ideas and add your own ideas as well.

<https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/coronavirus-guidance/coronavirus-resources/>

## Weddings and Banns of Marriage

See Appendix 1 below, provided by the Diocesan Registrar

## Funerals

For the most up to date information, please make sure you read the funerals section on the Church of England website.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches#na>

Reference should also be made to the **Funeral Guidance for Clergy & Parish Leadership Teams** which contains sensitive information which must not be shared with the wider PCC or public. See Appendix 2.

Please also note this text from the letter sent to Funeral Directors across Devon and copied to all Incumbents

*Whilst the Archbishops have suspended public worship, funerals may still go ahead, but services must be scaled back so that we reduce the numbers attending to single figures. Our network of clergy and licensed lay ministers are available to conduct services both at crematoria, burial grounds and of course our churches.*

*During the crisis a number of colleagues may of course become ill or have to self-isolate, and our network of retired older clergy will be unavailable due to government advice to self-isolate. To assist with your funeral planning, and to support families we are introducing an 'Emergency Funeral Line', when you are unable to contact your local church parish. If you call 01392 272686 one of our Team will be able to take details of the funeral and then arrange for one of our clergy to conduct the service.*

*We will also be encouraging local clergy to suggest that once the crisis is under control, a Memorial Service may be able to be arranged to assist families dealing with their sense of loss.*

Key points:

Funerals may still take place in church. However, numbers attending must be limited to single figures (not including bearers who will not stay in church during the service), with those present distancing themselves

as appropriate. Additional persons such as vergers should not attend. People over 70 and otherwise at risk should be discouraged from attending.

The best practice would be very small private funerals, followed by memorial services once the crisis is over. Where burial is to take place, as an alternative to a funeral in church the burial service could be read at the graveside.

Any memorial services will need to be deferred until after the ban on public worship has been lifted.

*This advice relates to all funeral services whether they take place in church, at the graveside, at a crematorium or at a cemetery.*

What can people do if they can't attend a funeral:

Most crematoriums in England and some churches will have the facility to livestream a funeral service, or to enable people to be present via Skype or other media. Attending a funeral in this way would not be the same as being present with others, but would be a valid way to give thanks for a life, to commend someone to God's care, and to hear the message of hope which will be much needed at this time.

There is also a facility to light a candle online and prayers and information on the CofE website.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/funerals/light-candle>

## **Baptisms**

New advice will follow shortly. However, it is clear that baptisms will be restricted in some way and it is expected that many families will choose to postpone them.

## **Confirmations**

New advice will follow shortly.

## **Annual Parochial Church Meetings and Meetings of Parishioners for Election of Churchwardens**

APCMs which have not yet taken place are to be postponed. Further advice will follow shortly about when meetings can be held, the position of current officeholders, and what to do with the blue and pink data forms. We are currently processing guidance from the national Church.

All Archdeacons' Visitations scheduled for June have been cancelled, and new arrangements will be announced in due course.

## **PCC meetings and Standing Committees**

Wherever possible, PCC meetings should be postponed. Alternatively, business may be dealt with by email following the procedure set down in the Church Representation Rules (M29), agreed decisions being minuted accordingly. Small standing committee meetings may still take place provided self-isolation and social distancing guidance is followed.

## **Church Meetings**

What about other church meetings, home groups, youth groups, etc.?

In the light of the Government's guidance, church-related meetings should not take place unless absolutely necessary and only then in full compliance with hygiene and distancing requirements. Church groups should refrain from meeting face to face but may decide to keep in touch online or by phone. Some may arrange to pray or study the scriptures in their own homes at the same time.

## **Use of church halls**

What about external gatherings and meetings in church halls - parent and toddler groups, debt counselling, Alcoholics Anonymous etc?

As we are not using our church buildings for our normal gatherings for worship, their use by other groups or denominations must, logically, also be suspended in order to protect the public. However, where a church or hall is used as a base for social care provision such as a food bank, it will be important to arrange continued access, with social distancing measures in place.

## **Communications**

Will there be signs? Will open churches be staffed?

We will encourage churches to put up signs reminding people on the necessary precautions. Some churches will be open and some not; some may have clergy or other church workers present at certain times. <https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/we-are-open-for-contemplation-and-prayer.pdf>

How will churches maintain contact, especially with the vulnerable?

We are encouraging churches to find creative ways of staying in touch with those who are isolated and vulnerable and to give them spiritual support and also practical support as far as possible. We have published a list of digital and print resources and we are also developing new content. Read more on the digital resources section of the coronavirus page on the CofE website or on our own Diocese of Exeter website at <https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/coronavirus-guidance/coronavirus-resources/>

## **Bell Ringing**

Team bell ringing will need to be suspended, but a single bell may be tolled.

## **Visiting**

In circumstances where people are self-isolating because they are symptomatic or have been in contact with someone who has been symptomatic or because they are vulnerable due to underlying medical conditions or simply because they have chosen to self-isolate, no pastoral visits should be undertaken until their isolation ends. However, do offer phone support.

If someone is not self-isolating and would like a pastoral visit, please make sure you follow rigorous health and hygiene practices and maintain social distancing.

## **Digital Giving**

Please encourage people to continue giving during the crisis perhaps making the most of digital opportunities: <https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/giving/digital-giving/>

## **Coronavirus Reporting**

What happens if someone is found to have Coronavirus who attended one of your services?

See advice from Public Health England <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

## **Web Links**

Church of England Advice <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

Diocese of Exeter - General Advice

<https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/coronavirus-guidance/>

Diocese of Exeter - Community Advice

<https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/coronavirus-guidance/coronavirus-resources/>

Public Health England - for advice about contact with those with coronavirus: 030036 916473

The Ven. Andrew Beane, Archdeacon of Exeter

[archdeacon.of.exeter@exeter.anglican.org](mailto:archdeacon.of.exeter@exeter.anglican.org)

01392 425577

The Ven. Douglas Dettmer, Archdeacon of Totnes

[archdeacon.of.totnes@exeter.anglican.org](mailto:archdeacon.of.totnes@exeter.anglican.org)

01626 832064

The Ven. Nick Shutt, Archdeacon of Plymouth

[archdeacon.of.plymouth@exeter.anglican.org](mailto:archdeacon.of.plymouth@exeter.anglican.org)

01752 858382

The Ven. Dr Mark Butchers, Archdeacon of Barnstaple

[archdeacon.of.barnstable@exeter.anglican.org](mailto:archdeacon.of.barnstable@exeter.anglican.org)

01271 375475

## Appendix 1

### The Coronavirus and marriage in the Church of England

#### Guidance to clergy in the Diocese of Exeter

On 17th March the Archbishops of Canterbury and York advised, in line with Government advice, that all public worship in the Church of England including regular Sunday and weekday services be paused until further notice.

The Church of England guidance states that wedding services can take place but subject to the rules and guidance on social distancing. Any wedding in a church would therefore need to be on a very small scale. Only five people legally need to be present at a marriage service: the couple and the clergy person, plus two witnesses. The guidance to churches in the Diocese of Exeter is that no more than 4 additional persons should be present in the Church during the wedding service, thereby making a maximum total of 9 persons in the Church.

The following is advice of a general nature intended for clergy addressing some of the key issues. This note is considered to be correct as of 18th March 2020.

#### **Frequently Asked Questions**

##### ***The banns have been read and a date fixed for the wedding – whose decision is it to cancel or postpone the wedding?***

Unless the government changes the law, the common law right of parishioners and those with a qualifying connection to be married in a parish church remains. However, the date, time and other arrangements are, legally speaking, for the minister to determine. It is for the minister, in consultation with the couple, to make a decision about whether the marriage can take place during the Coronavirus outbreak. It would also be for the minister to prescribe any conditions if the wedding was to go ahead in his or her church, such as limiting the numbers in attendance (as above) and to ensure social distancing. This is especially important in small churches.

Any cancellation, postponement or change to conditions of a wedding should be taken in consultation with the couple, mindful to ensure that any decision to postpone the wedding does not cause unnecessary financial hardship to the couple if they cannot recover costs of other expenses, such as for reception venues. The terms of existing wedding insurance should be checked by the couple to ascertain in what circumstances insurance will be available to them.

If the minister cancels the wedding it is recommended that all fees paid to the Parochial Church Council should be refunded, with the possible exception of the fee for the reading of the banns and for the banns certificate. If the Parochial Church Council have sub-contracted with other parties to provide other services, eg the purchase of flowers, and would suffer loss if the wedding were not to take place, then this is a matter of the law of contract and separate advice should be taken.

### ***The reading of the banns has not been completed – what can we do?***

Banns are to be published on three Sundays preceding the marriage. There is no requirement that these should be three successive Sundays. Banns must be published at either the principal service or both the principal service and another service. Since public services cannot currently be held the reading of banns cannot take place and so those that have been commenced but not completed will be invalid and the couple will need to obtain an alternative marriage preliminary if the wedding is to go ahead (see below).

It is our view that banns cannot be read behind closed doors, to a limited number of people or where no members of the congregation are invited to attend, whether or not the service is to be “live-streamed” to a wider digital community.

### ***The reading of the banns has not commenced – what needs to be done?***

The couple need to decide if they still wish to continue with the wedding notwithstanding the restrictions. If they do then the alternative marriage preliminaries will need to be used. It is recommended that the fee for the reading of banns be returned to the couple.

### ***Banns have been read and completed in the church where the wedding is to take place but have not been finalised in the parish where the couple live – what then?***

Again if the wedding is still proceeding then the couple will have to use the alternative preliminaries and this is because it is impossible to validate the reading of the banns process due to the lack of public services.

### ***The banns have been read and the couple want to postpone the wedding – will their banns still be valid?***

A marriage after banns must be solemnized within three calendar months from the last publication. After three months the publication of banns becomes void. The banns will either need to be re-read, or if that is not possible, another preliminary for the marriage – common or special licence or superintendent registrar’s certificate (see below) will be needed.

### **What are the alternative marriage preliminary options?**

**Common licence** – this is the Bishop’s permission for a marriage to take place in a particular church. In order to qualify for to have a common licence one or both of the parties to the proposed marriage must:

- have resided in the parish where the marriage is to take place for at least 15 days immediately preceding the date when the affidavit for the Common Licence is sworn; or
- be on the church electoral roll; or
- one of the parties must be able to show a qualifying connection with the parish (Church of England Marriage Measure 2008).

Normally, if a couple would have been able to marry by banns, then they would be eligible for a common licence.

To apply for a common licence, you should advise the couple to apply direct to the Diocesan Registry either by phone or email (see the contact details below). The couple will be required to complete a Welcome Form and return it to the Registry and then arrangements will be made for the Registrar (or a surrogate if necessary) to meet with the couple in person to swear an affidavit that their details are correct. Once the affidavit is sworn then the Registrar will provide the signed and sealed licence and this will need to be handed to the priest who is conducting the wedding. This is authority for the wedding to proceed in the church subject to whatever restrictions and conditions may be appropriate to protect public health.

Note that common licences are only valid for 3 months from the date of swearing the affidavit and would need to be re-applied for and the affidavit re-sworn if the wedding was to be postponed to a later date. Consideration needs to be given to whether it is sensible for the process to be commenced in a situation where the wedding is being postponed, or if the wedding is more than two months away, as at the present time we do not know what further precautions the Government may need to impose on the general population.

**Superintendent registrar's certificate** – these are normally only used when one of the parties to the marriage is a non-UK/EEA foreign national. More information is available from the civil Register Office from which they are issued. At the time of writing the validity period is twelve months. There is a 28 day notice period (which can be increased to 70 days in the case of non-UK/EEA nationals) between the giving of Notice of Intended Marriage and the issue of the SRC. Therefore as the law presently stands, SRCs cannot be obtained at very short notice.

**Special licences** – are issued from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Faculty Office. If the options above are not available and if all else fails, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Faculty Office is able to grant a special licence for a marriage to take place at any convenient time or place in England or Wales. The issue of a special Licence is discretionary and there must be good cause as to why a Licence is required. Please make an early enquiry with the Faculty Office if you think a special licence will be needed. Although special licences are normally issued with a three month period of validity, in view of the Coronavirus the Faculty Office is now issuing licences with a one year validity period.

### ***What about more complicated cases?***

More complicated cases will occur, so please make contact with us to discuss the issues and we can then guide you through what is required.

### ***Will the couple get their money back for costs paid out?***

Separate advice will need to be taken by the couple about costs paid out or committed by them, such as for wedding reception venues. If the minister cancels the wedding, then it is recommended that where possible church costs which have already been paid to the Parochial Church Council should be refunded, with the possible exception of fees for banns if they have already been read. A conversation with the couple should occur prior to cancellation or postponement in order to fully appreciate the financial consequences and to ascertain the best way of proceeding which would cause the minimum financial loss but ensure the safety of all.

In some cases it may be necessary for the clergy person who is conducting the wedding to provide written confirmation of a cancellation or postponement. It is acceptable to provide such a letter but it is advisable

to refer to the national guidance on the postponement of church services on the Church of England website and the guidance that is being given by the Government in regards to ensuring the safety of parishioners at this time. If you require assistance with such a letter then please contact the Registry.

***What if the officiating minister or couple fall sick?***

Arrangements should be made to ensure that there is a back-up Anglican member of the clergy with licence or permission to officiate in case the officiating minister is required to pull-out due to sickness. A lay person or a minister of another Christian church cannot officiate in the place of the Anglican member of the clergy. If the couple fall sick, serious consideration should be given to whether the wedding should proceed. That would be a matter to be risk-assessed in view of all the relevant information at the time. Please bear in mind that those with Permission to Officiate who are 70 or over will not be available at the present time to officiate due to government guidance for them to self isolate.

***What if you think that a guest attending the wedding service is ill or showing signs of coronavirus?***

You should follow national government guidance and ask that they do not attend the church and if necessary immediately call off the service in order to protect everyone present.

It is hoped that this guidance will cover most situations that you are likely to come across, but if further information is required then please contact the Registry on 01392 210700 and ask for the Registry Clerk Nathalie Cook or the Registrar Alison Stock or email us at [registry@stephens-scown.co.uk](mailto:registry@stephens-scown.co.uk)

Exeter Diocesan Registry

Curzon House

Southernhay West

Exeter EX1 1RS

## Appendix 2

# Guide for clergy/officiants conducting funerals according to the Coronavirus guidance

Correct as of Tuesday 18 March 2020, 16.00

**Please note:** This guidance is intended for use by Church of England Clergy and parish leadership teams and **should not be shared** more widely. Information for the general public and the bereaved on how funerals are affected by the Coronavirus outbreak can be found at [www.churchofengland.org/coronavirus](http://www.churchofengland.org/coronavirus)

It is clear from other countries' experience that we can anticipate a significant increase in deaths over the next weeks and months as a result of Coronavirus. The Government's guidance on social distancing and self-isolation including for those over 70yo or with underlying health conditions, and avoiding unnecessary travel will also have implications for the way we conduct funerals going forward.

The following points are aimed at helping clergy think through how best they may undertake funerals and meet the needs of the bereaved, whilst adhering to the Government's guidance. They are not an exhaustive list, and the situation is likely to change, but they give some suggestions as to how we can continue to offer this important service in a respectful, loving and gracious way, offering people the hope and comfort of God's love and care at a very difficult time.

Please also see further information available publicly on the Church of England COVID-19 webpage (<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>)

### 1. Before the funeral

Any interaction with the bereaved must be done safely – this may mean by telephone, skype etc. If meetings are held face to face, make sure you adhere to social distancing guidance, limit the number of people you are meeting to an absolute minimum, remind anyone self-isolating and/or with symptoms that they should not attend either the meeting or funeral in person, and choose the venue carefully – not in the house of someone who is self-isolating for example. Be careful about sharing documents, books, photos etc. Wash your hands thoroughly before the meeting and after

- You will need to explain that the funeral will be different to what they may expect from previous experience.
- Numbers of those attending the funeral must be kept to an absolute minimum – immediate family only for example. Those over the age of 70 and those with an underlying health condition should be strongly discouraged from attending.
- It may simply not be possible for family relatives or friends of the deceased's to be able to attend a funeral service as usual. However, clergy can still take a funeral at the graveside or crematorium, even if those present are limited to clergy and funeral directors.
- Consider, particularly if close relatives are unable to attend, whether to suggest that a memorial service could be held at some point in the future after this immediate crisis. Be aware though of your capacity to undertake potentially large numbers of these.
- If the situation arises when the number of funerals requires a change and reduction in length of the actual funeral service, this must be explained, so that expectations are managed.
- Hymns and singing is not advised as this may encourage droplet spread.
- No additional people should be expected to attend the service, such as an organist, vergers, sound

system operator etc

- Liaise with the funeral director about any particular issues or concerns they may have and how they wish to handle the coffin etc
- In order to avoid unnecessary travel, it may be sensible to hold the entire service at a crematorium if the body is to be cremated. This will depend on local circumstance and availability.
- If there is to be a burial, be aware of the capacity of local grave diggers

## 2. The funeral

- If the immediate family are self-isolating, consider ways in which they may be able to join the service – either through an audio link, skype etc. If this is not possible, consider arranging for those people to have an order of service provided so they are able to use it within the safety of their home to mourn their loved one.
- Make sure everyone adheres to the Government guidance on social distancing. This may have implications for how the coffin is brought into a church or crematorium. Be advised by the funeral director concerned.
- For those who are unable to attend the service, consider things such as recording the service if that is felt appropriate and is practical. This will be a challenging time for the bereaved and so you may need to think about other ways to both support them at this time, and to safely involve them in the funeral if they are unable to attend
- Other suggestions include inviting those who cannot attend to write their memories or a message that can be put in the coffin, if the funeral director is willing to do this.
- Be mindful of your own personal hygiene – wash your hands before and after, and avoid using communal Bibles etc
- Discourage shaking hands or kissing etc – this may be hard to manage, but try to remind people of the need for social distancing
- There should not be a “wake” or gathering after the funeral

## 3. After the funeral

- Think about whether you are able to provide any bereavement support for those concerned.
- If the partner or family member of the deceased is now alone and self-isolating, consider what support can be provided practically

## 4. Burial of ashes

- Delay this for as long as possible, and preferably until after the immediate crisis is over, to reduce demand on yourself, grave diggers etc and avoid unnecessary travel and contact by relatives.

## 5. Capacity and resilience

- Think now about ways to ensure capacity and resilience in terms of lay and ordained minister availability. What capacity do you have in your own team, and how might you support each other across a deanery?